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ABSTRACT

This is a guide for minority group members who are considering entering law school and offers suggestions for success in the application process, in law school itself, and in choosing a career path. The first chapters guide the reader in self-assessment. Chapter 1 poses challenging questions about reasons for considering law school and chances for acceptance. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the significance of achievement test scores and undergraduate transcripts. Chapter 4 encourages the reader to see him/herself as a valuable candidate for law school. Chapter 5 explores financial options including financial aid sources, and where to seek further information. The second section concentrates on exploration of law schools. Chapter 6 looks at how to gather information and how to assess the schools that best match particular needs and interests. Chapter 7 answers questions about sending out applications. Chapter 8 offers additional detail about communicating with the admission office especially ways to demonstrate accomplishments in college and professional life. Chapter 9 describes what happens in the admission office after the application arrives. Chapter 10 discusses what to do, and what to think about when a response arrives. Profiles of practicing minority group lawyers are interspersed throughout the volume. Appendixes contain decision profiles, sources of information on financial aid, suggested readings, and information on differences between law schools approved and not approved by the American Bar Association. (JB)

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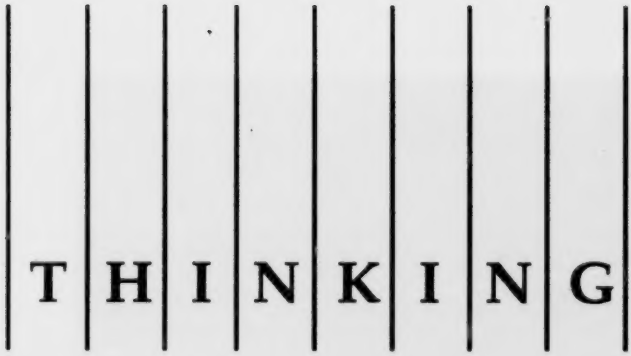

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Table of Contents

- Introduction

- Section I Assessing Yourself 1

  - Chapter 1 Law School and You: Consider the Facts 5
    Is law school right for you? ... Evaluating your chances ... Making the most of your application

  - Chapter 2 Testing, Testing...Your LSAT Score 13
    When to take the LSAT ... Preparation for the test ... Test-taking strategies ... Your score

  - Chapter 3 Making the Grade: Your Undergraduate Transcript and GPA 25
    Course selection ... Importance of grades ... Other variables

  - Chapter 4 Building Your Case: Assess Yourself 31
    Work experience and community service ... Extracurricular activities ... Military service ... Alumni connections

  - Chapter 5 Financial Considerations: Calling All Resources 35
    Cost of applying ... Cost of attending ... Scholarships, loans, and work-study ... Determination of eligibility ... Debt management ... Working while in law school ... Loan repayment assistance

- Section II Researching the Law Schools 45

  - Chapter 6 Selecting Schools: Dream a Little, Be Realistic, Be Safe 47
    Gathering the data ... Narrowing the choices ... School locale ... School reputation ... School atmosphere

  - Chapter 7 Do the Right Thing: Mechanics of the Application Process . . 61
    Forms ... Timelines ... Avoiding common pitfalls ... Resources for people with disabilities ... Fee waivers ... Other resources

  - Chapter 8 What You Say Counts: Your Personal Statement and Letters of Recommendation . . 73
    Tips on crafting a statement ... Recommendations—who to ask, how to ask

  - Chapter 9 Behind the Scenes: The Admission Office 81
    When are decisions made? ... How are decisions made? ... Waiting list ... Hold list ... Who are the application readers?

- Section III The Verdict Is In: Now What? 85
  - Chapter 10 The Letter Arrives! What's Next? 87
    Seat deposits... Deferrals ... Transferring ...Your final selection ... If you don't get admitted
- Appendices
  - Appendix A Decision Profiles 93
  - Appendix B Selected Information Sources on Financial Aid for Minorities 99
  - Appendix C Selected Readings for Prelaw Students 101
  - Appendix D Differences Between ABA-approved and Non-ABA-approved Law Schools 103
- The Voices of Success: Profiles (throughout)

Notice

After *Thinking About Law School: A Minority Guide* went to press, Congress passed the Higher Education Amendments of 1992, which made slight alterations in the criteria for awarding federal student loans and other types of financial aid. The purpose of this notice is to alert you to the following changes in the information contained in Chapter 5 of the *Guide*:

- **Loans (pp.37-38)**

Name change. The name of Guaranteed Student Loan Program has been changed to the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). In order to emphasize the fact that this is a federal program, all loans that are part of the program have been renamed. For example, the Stafford Loan Program is now the Federal Stafford Loan Program.

Federal Stafford Loan. A new unsubsidized, non-need-based Federal Stafford Loan has been authorized, permitting borrowers to capitalize interest payments and defer payment until graduation, if they wish to do so.

Loan applications. The act mandates a new standardized federal loan application form to be approved by the Department of Education. This will change the current Law Access® 3-in-1 application form referred to in the *Guide*. Federal and private loans will require separate applications for the 1993-94 academic year.

Consolidation requirements. In order to qualify for a Federal Consolidation Loan, a borrower must now have a minimum outstanding debt of $7,500 in eligible federal student loans. The previous minimum was $5,000.

- **Resources and Need Analysis (pp.40-41)**

Independent/dependent status. Beginning with enrollment periods on or after July 1, 1993, all graduate or professional school students will be considered independent from parental support. This change may affect the applicant's need analysis calculations used to determine financial aid eligibility.

Home equity. As of July 1, 1993, the equity in a home will no longer be considered an asset in need analysis calculations whether the home is owned by the applicant or, if dependent, the applicant's parents.

The requirements for federal student loans, private loans, scholarships, and grants are constantly changing. While we will make every attempt to include these changes in future editions of the *Guide*, anyone who intends to apply for law school financial aid should contact the financial aid office of his or her undergraduate school or any ABA-approved law school for the current requirements of financial aid programs.

Introduction

If you are thinking about law school, you are taking the essential first step toward a potentially rewarding career in the law. Embarking on a legal education requires a great deal of thought as well as a sizeable investment of time, money, and energy.

This handbook will guide you in your thinking and provide realistic suggestions for your success in the law school application process, in law school, and in choosing a career path.

Being a lawyer is not the only profession open to you, but it can be gratifying in many different ways—and we believe that many people of color mistakenly assume that the profession is closed to them.

Do not underestimate yourself (or overestimate those you see in law school or practicing law). Do not look at the profession, or at law school, and assume that it is beyond your ability and reach. Do not dismiss this option before looking closely and dispassionately at your prospects.

The practicing bar is full of successful lawyers who have a wide range of LSAT scores and grade-point averages. Moreover, today, virtually all law schools are taking steps to improve the dramatic underrepresentation of minorities in the practicing bar. These steps include a variety of outreach and affirmative action programs that may well make you a very competitive applicant of interest to many schools—even if it seems at first that your grades, test scores, or life experience may fall short of those you think law schools expect.

In the chapters that follow, we hope to assist you in making a reasoned assessment of your options. We provide data about schools' current practices and information about how the admission process works. We emphasize what we strongly believe is the most important strategy for success—in this and other endeavors: assessing yourself. In doing so, you will be taking your first step toward doing what lawyers do: challenging assumptions and taking nothing for granted, and seeing yourself as a responsible participant who can have an impact on the future, rather than as a passive actor who permits the future to happen. This book is intended to guide you in that effort.

Why would you want to become a lawyer? There are many reasons. You may want to learn the skills a lawyer uses, and apply them either in legal practice or in some other job. You may be drawn to legal work in itself and to a challenging position in the discipline. You may want to help increase minority representation in or before the bar. You may be motivated by a desire to see justice done or to change the system, and you feel that the lawyer's tools can help accomplish those goals. You may want to make money: for decades, becoming a lawyer has been a way that tens of thousands of people have used their wits and their education to be upwardly mobile and to improve their financial situation.

As is true in any profession, not all lawyers are wealthy, and not all accomplish the objectives they set out to achieve. But all of these goals are realistic ones, and many people—including an increasingly large number of people of color—have found the legal profession to be a fulfilling career, both personally and financially.

You will hear some of those people speak to you about their experiences in profiles that appear throughout this book. Some time ago, these individuals were at the deciding point in their lives at which you are right now in yours. They applied to law school, got in, attended, and became lawyers.

The law used to be described as a "calling." If you find yourself drawn to the stories of these people, if something about their work and their struggle excites you, then you owe it to yourself to think seriously about going to law school.

That is no simple task. Applying to law school is itself a good deal of work, not all of it fun, not all of it free. You must take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). You must assess your own credentials, you must find out about the law schools, you must learn about the admission process, and then you must decide where to apply.

The first section of the book will guide you in self-assessment. You should develop a keen and realistic sense of your own strengths and weaknesses, based on what it is that schools look for in an applicant. Chapter 1 poses some hard questions, and asks you to evaluate your reasons for considering law school and your chances for getting in. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the significance of your LSAT score and your undergraduate transcript. You may find some information here that will surprise you. Chapter 4 continues the theme of "building your case" by providing a lens through which you may view yourself as a valuable candidate for law school admission and discusses the importance of your work experience, community service, extracurricular activities, and so on. Chapter 5 explores your financial options; law school is expensive, but that doesn't mean you can't afford it. This chapter includes a survey of financial aid sources as well as instructions on where to go for further information.

The second section concentrates on your exploration of the law schools, especially in light of your recent self-assessment. Chapter 6 tells you how to gather information, and how to assess the schools that best match your needs and interests. The chapter suggests a three-pronged plan for covering all your bases—by dreaming a little, being realistic, and playing it safe in selecting schools to which you will apply. Chapter 7 is designed to answer questions you may have about the myriad details of sending out your applications. Chapter 8 offers additional detail about communicating with the admission office, especially in terms of demonstrating who you are including your accomplishments in college and in your professional life. Chapter 9 gives a behind-the-scenes look at what happens in the admission office after your application gets there. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses what to do, and what to think about, when the letter arrives.

This book offers encouragement, information, and strategies to help you apply to law school, and become a lawyer, if you determine that path is right for you. We hope the book will act as a useful and enlightening guide, and we wish you luck in gaining admission to a school that fits your goals and abilities.

Section I

Assessing Yourself

Barbara Jordan sought a career in law because she was "looking for a field which would be interesting and unusual for a person of my race and sex. Law seemed to fill that bill."

Jordan received her law degree from Boston University in 1959, three years after graduating from Texas Southern University with a degree in political science and history. She called her law school experience "a combination of intimidation and enlightenment."

After graduation, this native Texan returned to her home state and went directly into private practice in Houston. She was also the administrative assistant to the County Judge of Harris County. In 1966, Jordan began a distinguished career as an elected official that lasted until 1978. She served as a senator to the Texas state legislature until 1972. During her final year in the Senate, Jordan was the president pro tempore as well as "Governor for a Day." That same year the people of the 18th Congressional District elected Jordan to represent them in the United States House of Representatives. She served as a member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, the House Committee on Government Operations, and the Steering and Policy Committee of the Democratic Caucus. Jordan's major legislative achievements that were enacted into law include: amendments to the Voting Rights Act that expanded its coverage and provided for the printing of bilingual ballots; repeal of federal authorization for state "Fair Trade" laws that sanctioned vertical price fixing schemes; and detailed mandatory Civil Rights enforcement procedures for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and the Office of Revenue Sharing.

According to Jordan, having a law school education "has proved to be an excellent base for not only the practice of law but most any other area of interest."

After leaving public office in 1978, Jordan turned to the world of academia. From 1979 to 1982, she held the Lyndon B. Johnson Public Service Professorship at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, at the University of Texas at Austin. Since 1982, Professor Jordan has been the holder of the Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy at the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

It has been Jordan's experience that "the people you serve respect no limits on your capacity to do what they want done." The respect and recognition that has been shown to Jordan includes 29 honorary doctoral degrees; dedication in her name of the 1990 edition of the Annual Survey of American Law by the New York University School of Law; recipient of the Harry S. Truman Public Service Award; appointment by the secretary-general of the United Nations to serve on a panel to conduct hearings on the role of transnational corporations in South Africa and Namibia; presenter of the keynote address at the National Democratic Convention in 1976; and selection by the editors of *Ladies Home Journal* as among the "100 Most Influential Women in America."

Chapter 1

Law School and You: Consider the Facts

Consider the facts: There are many applicants to law school. Admission to law school is competitive. The application process is time consuming and demanding.

Consider these facts as well: Minorities remain underrepresented in law schools throughout the country and in the legal profession. People who care about legal education and the future of the profession are genuinely concerned about this imbalance.

Law schools today actively seek minority applicants, a category that includes African American, Asian American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, American Indian, and Native Canadian students. This effort has wide-ranging benefits for all students and for the profession as a whole. Among the benefits:

- diversity in the law school classroom reflecting the perspectives that affect the U.S. legal system
- increased variety in the membership of the legal profession
- availability of a law school education to individual members of groups that historically have been denied those opportunities
- a wide range of legally trained professionals to serve an increasingly diverse society
- broad access to the sources of power sustained by the legal profession

Your interest in this book indicates that you have at least some curiosity about law as a profession. If you are considering law school, you have achieved some measure of success already. You may be a student presently enrolled in college. You may already be a college graduate, or perhaps you are only beginning to think about college now (in which case you are wise to plan ahead). If you have already graduated from college, you may have enrolled in graduate school, attended another professional program, or worked in a responsible position. If so, then you may know more than you think you know about self-assessment.

Whether or not you have had some experience in formally assessing yourself in relation to a specific goal—such as law school—the purpose of this chapter is to guide you in doing just that. We focus on three points every person **considering** law school should think about:

- whether to apply to law school;
- how to evaluate yourself as a potential applicant; and
- what special characteristics you have that might interest law schools.

Before examining these three points in more detail, we want to suggest that you adopt the same strategy of positive thinking toward the entire decision-making process, as it unfolds, that you have used in your life so far. Chances are you already know something about planning ahead to accomplish your goals and about working hard and sacrificing for a worthwhile end.

■ Is Law School Right for You?

Think about what inspired you to consider law school in the first place. Was it a person, an event, an experience, a problem, an aspiration, a desire? If your motivation is unclear or vague, give some thought to recalling, sharpening, and refining it. A strong, clear, and well-articulated motivation will help you sustain a maximum effort if you do go to law school.

Perhaps your motivation is based on an idea you have formed of what lawyers do, the kind of salary they earn, or the power that lawyers are thought to exercise in our society—their capacity to change things, to help people, to solve problems, to make a difference, and to exert influence. Many lawyers are certainly drawn to the profession because of some combination of these ideas and ideals. But broad impressions are not a sound basis for making a decision that will require a major investment of your resources—personal and financial. It is important that you take a close look at the profession today and assess just now closely your ideals measure against the reality. It is additionally important to learn not just what it is really like to **be** a lawyer, but also about what it is like to **be a law school student**.

How might you do this? Primarily by reading and talking to people: you should research library sources, discuss your ideas with lawyers in your city or town, contact one of the minority lawyers' organizations in your state or city. You might visit a law school in your area and talk with an admission officer, or with a law professor and law students. Consult a prelaw advisor or career counselor at your college—whether you are currently attending or you have already graduated—or other person knowledgeable about law as a career.

Law school is not for everyone. Earning a legal education will take at least three years. It will demand an intense amount of energy and attention. Whether you go full time or part time, law school is likely to impose a heavier load than you have undertaken previously in your school or work experience. This is particularly true during the first year, when you must develop the ability to assimilate vast amounts of detailed information and analysis, learn a new system and professional language, and begin to think about problems and problem solving in a new and unfamiliar way. This training—"thinking like a lawyer"—takes time and can be quite difficult; it may even make you uncomfortable.

There may be things about the legal system that you think need to be changed. While you are in law school, however, it will be better if you adopt the stance of learning about the system, determining how it works, and identifying opportunities for reform. As a minority student, in particular, you have to be

careful to avoid mental roadblocks and psychological barriers that interfere with your capacity to develop your skills in law school to the best of your ability. As with your successes to date, the care with which you strike a balance between the demands of your coursework and other compelling issues will help you through law school and your professional life. Taking law school seriously and distinguishing yourself as a student will maximize your influence after law school.

Finally, law school can be expensive. In addition to tuition and related expenses, you will need to forego income from other employment in order to give your fullest attention to your studies. The decision to work while attending law school—either full- or part-time—must be considered carefully. Working should be undertaken only if there is no alternative, and it will require supreme effort and dedication on your part. If you must work, you may want to consider a law school that offers a part-time legal education program.

Law school costs will vary depending upon the kind of school you attend and whether you are awarded any grants or scholarships. Financial aid is available, too, in the form of student loans from law schools, the federal government, and other sources. Work-study programs exist as well. Chapter 5 discusses in greater detail how to manage and plan for tuition and related expenses.

■ Evaluating Your Chances

Law schools look at many characteristics and qualities, some of which are likely to pose a significant challenge for every law school applicant. These include your score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT); your undergraduate transcript, which is a record of the courses you took and the grades you received; the competitiveness of your undergraduate school; your major field of study; your standing within the school; and your graduate record, if any. Other important factors include letters of recommendation from college professors or—if you have worked—from your employers; personal accomplishments; graduate or professional training; extracurricular activities; and, finally—but not to be underestimated—your personal statement, which gives you an opportunity to "state your case," as well as to demonstrate your writing ability. In your statement, you will point out the positive factors mentioned here, you will describe in your own words who you are, how disciplined or motivated you are, and how law school will help you achieve the goals you have set for yourself. (See Chapter 8 for more on the personal statement.)

A word must be said here about your LSAT score. An important part of the application process is achieving a score on the test that is sufficiently competitive—combined with the other factors we have talked about—to enable you to be admitted to the law schools you select. That may appear to be a major hurdle, but there are strategies that you can undertake to do your best on this test. No one should take the LSAT without some form of preparation; in this book we devote an entire chapter to discussing this aspect of your application. (See Chapter 2 for more on the LSAT.)

Just how important is the LSAT score in relation to the other aspects of your application? It is important, but it is weighted differently at various schools. Law schools tend to evaluate your application file in comparison to other applicants' files. A strong grade-point average (GPA) can go some distance to compensate for a moderate LSAT score. Conversely, a strong LSAT score can balance, to some extent, a less than sterling GPA. Both of these statements are especially true when an applicant can demonstrate other important qualities that interest a school. Even a relatively modest LSAT/GPA combination may be offset by other characteristics at some law schools—for example, economic adversity which required that you work while you attended school. But be forewarned that a low LSAT score combined with a low GPA will not be offset by such explanations as your overinvolvement with social activities, fraternities or sororities, extracurricular clubs, and the like.

When evaluating yourself as a potential law school applicant, do not overvalue—or undervalue—any single factor. Keep in mind that a GPA or LSAT score that is not sufficiently competitive at one law school may be a ticket to admission at another. An application that may appear to be noncompetitive in isolation may be relatively strong when compared with other applications in a particular law school's applicant pool.

■ What Special Characteristics Do You Bring To Your Application?

Once you have established that law school is what you want, and you have gained an understanding of how law schools will measure you against other potential applicants, it's time to take a closer look at how you might achieve your goal.

The Law School Admission Council has adopted a *Statement of Good Admission Practices* for its member schools. The *Statement* specifies that, in making an admission decision, "a law school should give special consideration to applicants who are members of cultural, ethnic, or racial groups that have not had adequate opportunities to develop and demonstrate potential for academic achievement and would not otherwise be meaningfully represented in the entering class."

Thus, as a minority applicant, you start out with a positive factor that most schools will consider. You may or may not feel comfortable about that, but you should view it dispassionately for the following reason: If you apply to a law school and you have the most competitive credentials, you can be relatively sure you will be admitted. Conversely, if your credentials are so weak that a law school does not believe you have a realistic prospect of succeeding if you are admitted, then you may also be assured that you will not be admitted. Regardless of race or ethnicity, **no law school admits applicants that it determines are not qualified**. In both cases, your minority status will not be a factor in the decision.

If your credentials are in what some admission professionals refer to as the middle range, minority status may be one factor, among others, that a school may consider when making offers of admission. Because your job now is to consider the factors that may make your application most attractive to the greatest number of

law schools, you can think of your minority status as one of the important assets that you bring to the admission process.

As noted earlier in this chapter, there are a number of reasons a law school may consider your minority status a positive factor. A school may be looking for minority applicants who have particular ties to their communities and have a commitment to providing service for underserved populations; therefore, if you have such ties and that commitment, you should view them as special characteristics to be emphasized when you are assessing yourself as a candidate for law school.

Some law schools may be interested in expanding diversity in the classroom; therefore, those applicants who have demonstrated a strong identity with their cultural heritage may have something special to offer that particular law school. You will want to highlight courses you have taken, activities you have pursued, or other ways in which you have demonstrated your cultural identity.

A law school might have as part of its mission a commitment to affirmatively provide opportunities to persons who are members of groups that suffered from past discrimination or educational disadvantages. For that reason, you should think about the ways in which your education, class, socioeconomic, or family background may have presented obstacles that you have had to overcome in order to achieve the successes you have had to date. For example, perhaps you are the first member of your family to attend college, or one of the few in your high school class who went on to college. You might have been directed toward a job-based vocational program in high school, but pursued college anyway. Perhaps you attended schools that placed little emphasis on standardized testing. Any factors such as these should become part of your self-evaluation when preparing for the rigors of the law school application process.

A word of caution: It would be foolish to try to fabricate or exaggerate your personal history to misrepresent who you are. However, if the law school catalog tells you that certain factors are relevant, and if those factors apply to you, there is every reason for you to point them out. If you take the time to evaluate yourself carefully early on, you will find it easier to write a personal statement later (see Chapter 8). Careful self-evaluation—including all characteristics or qualities that highlight your individuality—will be helpful when it comes time to match the various law schools to your own qualifications, and to decide where to submit your applications.

■ Conclusion

Now that you are thinking about law school, you should bear in mind that you will need a strategy for continuing the success you have experienced in your academic or work experience up to this point. Carefully consider whether law school is what you want. Think about what motivates you, whether your ideas about law school and the legal profession are realistic, and what specific sacrifices

you will have to make to attain your goal. If law school is what you want, then you should next consider the factors that favor your admission. Give some thought to the following questions:

- What would be your strengths as a law student?
- What may be your weaknesses?
- What does your undergraduate transcript suggest about you as a future law student?
- What aspects of your work experience will aid your success in law school?
- What personal and cultural qualities do you have that will make you a more attractive applicant than someone else with your basic credentials?
- Why do you want a career in law?

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss these questions further and specify how they relate to specific aspects of your overall application to law school.

John E. Echohawk

John E. Echohawk, a member of the Pawnee tribe of Oklahoma, was born and raised in New Mexico. He graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1967 with a degree in government. At that time there were thought to be only two dozen Indian lawyers in the entire United States. The University of New Mexico had a Special Scholarship Program in Law for American Indians. Echohawk was accepted into that program. "To be proportionally represented in the legal profession," he said, "there should have been 1,000 Indian lawyers. Federal financial assistance for native Americans studying law has continued over the years and estimates today put the number of Indian attorneys at 600."

"Although the state of New Mexico has one of the largest populations of native Americans of any state, there were no native American law graduates of the University of New Mexico School of Law until I graduated from there in 1970."

"During law school, my fellow students and I were exposed for the first time to the obscure field of federal Indian law—the Indian treaties and the thousands of federal laws and regulations relating to Indian tribes. We realized that tribes had substantial rights under federal Indian law that were not being asserted because most tribes did not have enough money to hire attorneys and the federal government did not adequately protect these rights for the tribes for political reasons."

After graduation from law school, Echohawk felt the need to address the lack of Indian legal representation. To that end he helped to organize and establish the Native American Rights Fund, a nonprofit Indian legal organization that raises funds and hires Indian attorneys who are available to represent tribes, Indian organizations, and individuals in cases of major significance at little or no cost.

"I have served as executive director of the organization since 1977 and have seen Indian tribes successfully assert their rights to sovereignty, natural resources, and human rights in ways that have substantially improved the social and economic conditions of native Americans."

Chapter 2

Testing, Testing...Your LSAT Score

All law schools presently approved by the American Bar Association (ABA) or the Federation of Law Societies of Canada (FLSC) require you to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) as part of the admission process. (On rare occasions, an exception may be made for people with certain disabilities.) Your LSAT score, along with your undergraduate grades, course transcript, letters of recommendation, and personal statement are all part of your application file. This file forms the basis for a decision on your application. In fact, the LSAT score is a critical factor in the **initial** sorting and ordering of hundreds of applications that are submitted to a law school admission office. It is not, however, the only deciding factor.

The LSAT score can help you learn much about your chances for admission to various schools that interest you. Later in this chapter, we offer suggestions to help you decide:

- when to take the test;
- how you might prepare for the test; and
- specific steps you should take before, during, and after the test.

■ Background on the LSAT

The LSAT was used for admission purposes by some law schools in the late 1940s and 1950s, and by most law schools in the 1960s. Prior to the 1960s, most law schools more or less accepted almost everyone who applied and did not rely on an applicant's LSAT score. Before deciding that those were the good old admission days, however, you should keep in mind that law school faculties in those days typically dismissed many more students than they do today. Today, very few students fail to complete the first year due to academic reasons, whereas in the 1950s schools would dismiss as many as half of their students after the first year.

The LSAT was designed to predict first-year student performance for law schools, much as the SAT and ACT were designed to accomplish the same end for colleges and universities. The test measures skills that are considered essential in law school: the ability to read and comprehend complex texts with accuracy and insight, to organize and manage information and draw reasonable inferences from it, to reason critically, and to analyze and evaluate the reasoning and arguments of others.

In its current form, the LSAT is a half-day standardized test consisting of three types of multiple-choice questions in five 35-minute sections and a 30-minute writing sample. The test is designed to compare some of your skills with those of other individuals who are taking (and have taken) the test.

One criterion against which the test is routinely assessed is how well the score predicts an applicant's first-year academic performance in law school. As a statistical predictor of first-year law school performance, the LSAT has been found through years

of study to correlate as high (or higher) with first-year performance for minority as for nonminority students.

When To Take The LSAT

The LSAT is administered four times each year, usually in February, June, October, and December. The dates for LSAT administration and the deadlines associated with those administrations can be found on the inside front cover of the *Information Book*, available from Law Services, law schools, many undergraduate schools, and from prelaw advisor and career planning offices. This book contains information on test administrations for Saturday Sabbath observers and on special accommodations for test takers with disabilities as well. The best time for taking the LSAT will vary from individual to individual, depending on such factors as:

- when you plan to attend law school;
- when you can afford the investment in the application process;
- application deadlines of the law schools in which you are interested; and
- the availability of a convenient testing center.

You should plan well in advance the date on which you will take the test. It is a good idea to give yourself at least several months, even as much as a year, to allow sufficient time to meet application deadlines and prepare for the test. Allow time to receive the score report and assess it before you start applying. If possible, you should try to take the test no later than the October administration of the fall **before** you want to begin. Taking the test too late in the process will hinder your ability to make the most informed decisions about where to apply. It is unwise to rush a process that has long-term implications for your career. The two sample application schedules, shown on pages 62 and 63, may guide you in your planning. (See Chapter 7 for information regarding application fee waivers.)

If you are concerned because you see that your lead time for this process is already too short, then seriously consider deferring your entry by a year in order to prepare properly and make your decisions with adequate information. Pushing things back by a year may seem very burdensome now, but rushing through this process can affect your entire professional life. The law school admission process cannot be hurried to good advantage; if you try to rush it, you sacrifice many, if not all, of the points at which you can influence the outcome. At the absolute minimum, you should be sure to take the test early enough for your score to be reported to the law schools to which you are applying before their application deadlines.

The most important factor to consider in deciding when to take the test, however, is **when you believe you are ready**. It is not advisable to take the LSAT as a "trial run" without any preparation. All LSAT scores and score cancellations during the five years prior to your law school application will be routinely reported to the law schools that you select. Law Services will also report the average of all your test scores. Because many law schools base admission decisions on the average of your scores, and because some schools may view repeated score cancellations negatively, do not take the test before you believe you are ready.

■ Preparing For The LSAT

Research has demonstrated that test takers who prepare for the LSAT perform better than those who do not. Preparation does **not** mean learning specific answers to specific questions. Nor does it mean intensive focused studying of particular coursework as you may have done for your college exams. It means becoming familiar with question types and answer formats, understanding the directions, and adjusting to the rigors of the time limitations. The LSAT is designed to measure your reasoning skills, so there are no shortcuts or ways to "beat" the test. **The best preparation for the test is a fundamentally solid undergraduate education with an emphasis on reading and reasoning skills, linked to familiarity with the essentials of the test**.

In the 1990-1991 test administration year, 96 percent of test takers reported doing some kind of test preparation before taking the LSAT. The most widely accessible—and least expensive—form of preparation is the material comprised of actual, disclosed test questions and test forms that has been published in the *Law Services Information Book*, *The Official LSAT PrepKit*, *The Official LSAT PrepBook*, and *The Official LSAT PrepTests*—all of which are available from Law Services, the organization that administers the test.

You will need to decide for yourself whether you can benefit from additional coaching or instruction, but there is no excuse for not working through the available samples, at the very least. Research indicates that a large proportion of LSAT test takers, **especially minority test takers**, do not take advantage of the preparation materials that are available at little or no cost from Law Services. **At a minimum, test takers should become familiar with the test by using these materials**.

If you decide coaching will help you, you will be best served by coaching before you take the test for the first time. Because all of your scores will eventually be reported, you should do your best to insure that your first score is as high as possible. Various courses are offered by both colleges and commercial companies; they may range in price from $250 to over $800. **Law Services does not endorse or evaluate any of these courses**. You must determine for yourself whether you believe that such a course would be useful to you. Some people believe that a course offers a disciplined context in which to do test preparation. The decision to take a test preparation course is another decision that will be aided by planning to take the LSAT

as early as possible in the application process. Beware of courses that advertise certain shortcuts or tricks with which to "beat" the test. Ask others who have already taken the course for their evaluations.

Some test preparation courses offer financial aid for economically disadvantaged test takers, so be sure to inquire about such assistance if you are seriously interested in a preparation course and are deterred for financial reasons.

■ What are Some Specific Test-Taking Strategies?

Familiarize yourself with the test. The most basic kind of test preparation is simply familiarizing yourself with the directions, the test format, the types of questions, and the pacing required to complete the test under timed conditions. It is essential that you obtain and read the *Law Services Information Book*, which contains sample questions for each LSAT item with explanations provided for the correct answers.

Becoming familiar with the directions for each test section as part of your preparation will save you valuable time during the actual test. As you become familiar with the test questions and answers, see if you can detect the skills and reasoning involved in answering questions of each type. In particular, practice making effective diagrams for answering Analytical Reasoning questions, and determine how best to read and annotate Reading Comprehension passages so that you can answer the questions based on those passages quickly and effectively. Work through at least one previously administered LSAT under timed conditions. *The Official LSAT PrepTests*, available from Law Services, can be used in this way.

Pace yourself. Taking the test under timed conditions as much like actual test conditions as possible allows you to determine how to pace yourself in order to complete the test. Never dwell on any one question. Each question has exactly the same value. Spending too much time on a question with which you are having difficulty may deprive you of time to answer questions that you may find easier to answer. **It is especially important for minority test takers to practice pacing and to prepare by taking previously administered tests under timed conditions. Law Services research has disclosed that minority test takers generally show a higher number of items not reached at the end of the test sections.**

Answer every question even if it means guessing. Because the LSAT is a "right-answers only" test, there is no penalty for wrong answers. When you do not answer questions on a right-answers only test, you deprive yourself of the chance that you might guess correctly and thus improve your score; most people will get (on the average) 20 percent of their guessed answers correct. If you can eliminate some possible responses as incorrect, you may also increase your chance of guessing a correct answer. When you can't identify an answer, eliminate as many responses as possible that you can identify as incorrect, then make your best guess among the remaining alternatives. The *Law Services Information Book* describes such general strategies in the section on preparing for the LSAT, and offers more specific strategies for each question type in the explanation given with the sample questions.

Sharpen skills tested by the LSAT. Taking actual, disclosed LSATs under timed conditions can reveal to you which question types give you the most difficulty. It may be useful for you to practice by working through a large number of those types of questions. Three hundred disclosed test questions are available in *The Official LSAT PrepBook*. Additional sources for sample questions are mentioned above. There are other LSAT preparation materials available commercially, and some test takers may find them of value. However, Law Services research shows that test takers who practice with questions taken from actual LSATs earn higher scores than test takers who use any of the other methods surveyed.

■ What Happens on the Day of the Test?

Registration. Once you have determined when you want to take the LSAT, you will find registration information and forms in the *Law Services Information Book*. Keep in mind that there is a limit to the number of test takers who can be accepted by a test center for each test administration. To improve your chances of being able to go to the test center of your choice, and on the date that you choose, you should register for the LSAT as soon as you decide when and where you want to take the test.

There may be circumstances, such as illness, that prevent you either from preparing for the test or from taking the test on a certain date after you have registered. In that case, you may want to change your test date. Information on how to do so can be found in the *Law Services Information Book*. If you believe that you are not ready to take the test on the date for which you have registered, you should not hesitate to postpone taking the test until you can perform to your fullest ability. You must, however, take the test in time to meet the application deadlines of the law schools that you select. **Keep in mind that if you delay taking the test until December or February, you will not have time to retest if a problem arises.**

Test administration procedures. Knowing what will be required of you, and understanding the purpose of the specific test administration procedures, will allow you to focus and concentrate on taking the test itself. A description of test administration procedures is contained in the *Information Book* and other Law Services publications. Such policies as no eating and no smoking are for your protection and are meant to ensure that the physical environment of the testing center is conducive to test taking.

Be sure to take your LSAT admission ticket (or alternative Law Services authorization) and at least one form of positive identification (a picture ID with your signature) to the testing center. You will not be admitted to the center without them; Law Services must be assured that the person taking the test is actually the person registered for the test. Law Services also requires a thumbprint for further identification. Test takers' thumbprints are used only by Law Services and are not given to anyone or any other organization.

You can expect to spend six to seven hours at the test center; this includes a review of the test administration procedures and the test itself. We recommend that you give some thought as to how much sleep and food you will require before you take the test.

You may request permission to leave the room if necessary, but you will not be permitted to make up any lost time. No food or drink may be brought into the test room. While staff at the test center make an effort to insure a comfortable temperature in the room, you may want to dress in a manner that allows you to adjust to warm or cold room temperatures.

The room supervisor will alert you when there are five minutes remaining in a test section, but you may want to bring a noiseless watch to the test center so that you can pace your progress during the test. Alarm watches, calculator watches, and "beeping" watches are not permitted because they may disrupt the concentration of other test takers.

■ How is the Test Score Used?

The test score can be one key for gaining insight into your admissibility at particular law schools that interest you. It can also be a signal for exploration of schools that you did not initially consider.

Most law schools publish data detailing the LSAT scores and the grade-point averages of entering students. Law school admission personnel can tell you in general how you compare with other applicants and with the students currently attending the school. Inquire about the LSAT score distributions of all admitted and enrolled students and of admitted and enrolled minority students at the law schools that interest you. Get a sense of how students with your LSAT score fare at the school, and where minority students are distributed from the top to the bottom of each law school class.

You can use your LSAT score and the score distributions of enrolled students to give you at least an impression of where you might fall within the LSAT range at that law school. Remember, the LSAT is not considered in isolation. Most schools combine your LSAT with your GPA for a combined predictor called an index. **You should not view the test score as a bar to applying, as a guarantee of admission, or as a definitive statement about how well you will do.** It is an indicator of the relative strength of your reading and reasoning skills. Everyone who graduates from an ABA-approved law school is equally certified by the law school dean to sit for the state bar examination of their choice. Similarly, every graduate of an FLSC-approved law school in Canada who serves a period of supervised apprenticeship may sit for a bar examination in that country. Only you can decide whether to apply to a particular school, and whether the possible outcome will justify your investment of time, money, and energy. (For additional data on decision profiles for minority applicant groups, see Appendix A.)

How Significant is the LSAT Score?

The LSAT score alone is far from a perfect predictor of law school success for any applicants; that is precisely why law school admission decisions are based on a number of factors. There will always be some who do significantly better in law school than the test would have predicted, and there will be others who do not do as well as predicted.

If you are planning to apply to law school, the test cannot be ignored or avoided. It is one indicator of how well suited you are to succeeding at the intellectual challenges of law school, but it is essential for you to understand that the **LSAT score carries a limited message**. If you don't score high on the test, that does not mean that you are ill-suited to be a lawyer. Law school is not just for the highest LSAT scorers. The first year requires intensive effort, time, discipline, motivation, and willingness to produce great quantities of work. The test does not measure those qualities.

It is up to you to use the score as part of your research and your self-evaluation before you apply to law school. If you receive a score that appears less than competitive, you must consider a variety of factors and decide whether to apply.

Interpreting Your Score

The purpose of the score is to provide the law schools with an objective basis for comparing you with other applicants. When you receive your score, you will also receive a percentile ranking for that score. That ranking tells you what percentage of the test takers during the indicated period had scores that were below the score you received. If the test score seems disappointing or inconsistent with scores you have received on college-entrance tests, remember that the group of people taking the test is itself a highly self-selected population and, overall, far more able in traditional terms than the college test-taking population. When you take the LSAT, you are competing against a group that, generally speaking, consists of the highest academic achievers from within the group of people who have graduated or are about to graduate from college. The important factor for admission to law schools is how your score competes with that of other applicants **to the law schools to which you apply**. A score that is not competitive at some law schools will be a competitive score at other law schools.

Keep in mind also that many schools take into account the differences in score distribution between and within minority populations. Also, many schools seek a diverse representation of qualified students in their entering class. For these reasons, it may be worthwhile to ask admission personnel or prelaw advisors how your score compares to the scores of other qualified minority applicants. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, most law schools do not consider your score by itself, but in conjunction with your undergraduate grade-point average (GPA) and the other information provided in your application. If you want to know how your

score compares with those of other applicants with whom you are competing **at a particular law school**, you may contact the admission office of that school. You may also refer to *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*, published by Law Services and available at a nominal cost. Every ABA-approved law school in the United States provides a program description for *The Official Guide*, and many schools include admission-profile grids. These grids illustrate the range of LSAT/GPA combinations that were achieved by successful applicants. (See Figure 2.1 on next page for sample.) Equivalent information for Canadian law schools can be found in the *Law Services Information Book—Canadian Edition*.

Most schools include paragraphs on admission that indicate what factors in addition to LSAT scores and undergraduate GPAs are considered in admission decisions, and what their policies are toward admitting minority candidates.

LSAT scores are now reported on a scale of 120 to 180, with a mean score of approximately 150 and a standard deviation of 10. Because a process called equating is used in determining your score, scores earned at different test administrations and on different test forms are comparable to each other. Law schools will not evaluate your score differently for different administrations of the test.

Figure 2.1: Sample Grid

	LSAT Percentile Ranks																					
	0-10		11-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80		81-90		91-99		Total	
	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm
GPA																						
3.75 +	2	0	4	1	9	1	8	4	9	8	9	9	2	2	4	4	1	1	3	3	51	33
3.50-3.74	3	0	20	3	20	3	18	6	19	13	13	12	12	9	6	5	6	5	1	1	118	57
3.25-3.49	12	2	33	5	44	4	36	14	34	14	25	21	33	32	12	10	4	4	5	4	238	110
3.00-3.24	21	2	45	3	84	4	61	4	62	19	51	35	21	18	14	13	7	7	2	2	368	107
2.75-2.99	34	1	46	3	69	7	95	6	60	12	49	20	36	25	20	18	14	13	3	3	426	108
2.50-2.74	22	1	52	3	71	10	58	4	58	7	40	9	20	7	20	7	13	11	2	2	356	61
2.25-2.49	33	2	30	0	35	3	24	5	30	1	28	3	14	6	15	3	12	4	2	1	223	28
2.00-2.24	12	0	14	1	16	0	13	0	15	4	12	3	7	1	3	1	5	2	2	0	99	12
2.00	5	0	2	0	4	0	3	0	4	0	1	0	4	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	27	1
No GPA	4	0	4	0	5	1	3	0	2	1	0	0	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	23	4
Totals	148	8	250	19	357	33	319	43	293	79	228	112	152	102	99	62	63	47	20	16	1929	521

Apps = Number of Applicants
Adm = Number Admitted

■ Taking the LSAT More Than Once

Most applicants who take the test a second time do so because they believe that their previous score does not reflect their best effort, sometimes due to a failure to prepare adequately. Sometimes, because of an approaching deadline, you may need to register for a retest before receiving a score report; in such a case, you will have to rely on your own sense of how accurately you tested. On average, individuals who retest improve **slightly** on their previous score. However, a number of applicants have found that they receive **the same or a lower score** when they retest.

If you have a score report, you may want to determine how competitive your first score makes you as a minority applicant for admission to law schools in which you are interested. Only you can make this final decision, and it can be a very important one. You must balance the risk of receiving a lower score against the possibility that you may obtain a higher one and therefore be more competitive at the law schools of your choice. An alternative strategy is to do further research about other law schools that you did not consider before you received your first test score. Those law schools may be willing to admit you with your first LSAT score, and you will save the time, money, and energy of taking the test again. It is also a way to expand the pool of the law schools that will ultimately decide on your application. In any event, you will also want to keep a close eye on the school's application deadlines when formulating a decision about taking the test again.

For information regarding score cancellation, refer to the *Law Services Information Book*.

■ Conclusion

By the time you receive your LSAT score, you should have a clearer assessment of yourself, with the test score as one important part, but not the only part, of that assessment. Simultaneously, you should have already begun to gather information about the schools that interest you, which should help you choose the schools that seem appropriate for you. Knowing your chances of admission will guide your decisions about where to send your law school applications. Section II of this book—Researching the Law Schools—will guide you in that effort.

Henry Ramsey, Jr.

Henry Ramsey, Jr. was in his third year at the University of California Riverside—majoring in philosophy—when he decided he wanted to be a lawyer. "At that time I realized that the kinds of things I liked to do—problem solving, analytical reasoning—were the things that lawyers were doing."

Ramsey went directly from college to the University of California School of Law (Boalt Hall). He describes his law school days as "very enjoyable." He added, "I was not so much intimidated as I was in awe of what I was exposed to. I met people with whom I shared political and social values. I learned a lot. I was tremendously impressed by the fact that people entrusted their property, lives, and liberties to these written rules and would abide by things called law."

Since his graduation from law school in 1963, Ramsey has worked in private practice, academia, and government. He was a member of the Berkeley City Council (1973-1977); Superior Court Judge for the State of California, County of Alameda (1980-1990); member (1982-present) and chair (1991-1992) for the American Bar Association's Council of the Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar; law professor at his alma mater (1971-1980); member of the Judicial Council of California (1988-1990); and dean of Howard University School of Law (1990-present).

For Ramsey, a law degree "has served as the key to economic security for me and my family. It has allowed me to work effectively in the political and social arenas to help improve the lives of people who are poor and discriminated against. It has provided me with intellectual and personal satisfaction. You know how people say they wake up glad to go to work and go home and say they have had a great day? Well, that's what I can say."

There is no downside to this profession, according to Ramsey. However, "if you are in criminal law, it does expose you to the suffering in our society. That can be frustrating and depressing. There are no quick or easy answers or solutions to some problems. That also represents a challenge."

Chapter 3

Making the Grade: Your Undergraduate Transcript and GPA

Your undergraduate transcript conveys a number of messages about your college studies: the rigor of the courses you have taken, the extent to which you have mastered your coursework over a period of time, and trends in your course selection and academic performance that may reflect other aspects of your intellectual life.

How Law Schools Evaluate Your Course Selection

Law schools examine college transcripts for evidence that the applicant can master the basic skills required in law school. Foremost among these skills are the ability to write clearly and thoughtfully and to reason analytically and logically.

According to the Law School Admission Council's Statement of Good Admission Practices, intended as a guide for all LSAC-member law school admission offices, **"It is proper to prefer students who have taken courses such as those that develop skills in both written and oral communication, develop analytical and problem-solving skills, or promote familiarity with the humanities and social sciences to understand the human condition and the social context in which legal problems arise."**

There is no prelaw equivalent to an undergraduate premed course of study. College courses in law, therefore, are not necessarily an advantage for law school admission. Law schools will not give you credit toward your law degree for undergraduate law courses taken before you enroll. You should use your undergraduate education as an opportunity to explore and work on your intellectual development no matter how certain you are that you want law to be your career. Law schools don't care what you know about the law when you arrive; they care about how well you can write and analyze problems. They are looking for people with a solid academic foundation who will develop into lawyers, not the people who know the most law when they enroll as first-year students. Admission offices want evidence that you have chosen courses that made you think and write, rather than memorize and learn by rote.

That does not mean that you should take courses with an eye toward how they will be viewed by a law school. Law school admission committees want to see how the courses you chose relate to one another, and they want a sense of how you rise to intellectual challenge, whether in the sciences, the liberal arts, the business curriculum, or elsewhere. In assessing how favorably a law school will view your application, you should examine your courses. Try to fit them into this sort of overview. To what extent can they be seen as part of a whole, and to what extent do the parts seem to coalesce intellectually?

Admission-file readers are accustomed to reviewing transcripts that contain academically competitive courses and that use traditional academic measures of success. In other words, schools are looking for applicants who take challenging courses and do well in them. If you are still an undergraduate, be forewarned:

Don't just take the easy courses in an attempt to boost your grade-point average. Also, unusual courses in new disciplines or nontraditional methods of evaluation will require additional explanation when you make your case for admission to law school. In any case, you can discuss your academic selections and your performance in your personal statement (see Chapter 8).

In summary, a transcript with high grades in traditional undergraduate courses is an asset to you as you make your case for admission. Look clearly and carefully at your own accomplishments and measure them against others at your school. Admission offices will compare you to other law school applicants from your college, so you should assess yourself against the same measure—and with the same objectivity.

■ The Relative Importance Of Your Grades

You will have an opportunity to amplify the cold, hard data provided by the numbers and letters on your transcript when it comes time to write your personal statement. There are certain areas an admission officer may well consider when he or she reviews your file. These areas are worth your own close scrutiny when you assess yourself as a law school applicant:

Do your grades show a trend toward improvement or decline over time? Many law schools consider undergraduate-performance trends along with a student's numerical average. Thus, they may discount a slow start in a student's undergraduate career if he or she performs exceptionally well in the later school years. Similarly, admission committees may see an undergraduate's strong start followed by a mediocre finish as an indication of less potential to do well in law school. You would be well advised to comment in your personal statement about any such irregular patterns.

Do changes reflected on the transcript mirror something going on in your personal life? Here again, you will have an opportunity in the writing portion of your application to explain any special circumstances that have affected your grades.

Have you taken (or will you take) pass/fail courses? Clearly, an "A," "B," or "C" will say more about your academic performance than the "P" that you receive from a pass/fail course. Law schools, in trying to select from among a group of very qualified people, try to gather as much information as they can in order to make an intelligent selection. Grades help admission offices to sort applicants according to a hierarchy; insufficient information means harder work for the admission-file reader. Pass/fail grades do not add much to the file unless they can be placed in a context that explains how they furthered your educational goals. If that context is not illuminated on the transcript, you have to supply that context when you have an opportunity to do so. One way to supplement information relating to a "pass" grade is to provide written support from the faculty member who taught the course. Some colleges do not offer grades for all or part of their undergraduate coursework. Most of those schools do provide comprehensive narrative transcripts. Although most law schools are aware of these colleges, it is especially important

that your personal statement and letters of recommendation elaborate on your academic performance. (See Chapter 8 for additional discussion on these two important areas.)

Are you "reborn" (academically speaking, that is)? The term, as understood by law schools, refers not to a religious conversion but to a dramatic turnaround in a student's performance at a specific point in time. As one law school administrator describes it: "Every year we accept a few students who at one time flunked or dropped out of college but who later returned and did well. We accept others who either came back from military service reborn, or who, for a variety of other reasons, settled down and did strong academic work. We will readily work with someone who finishes strong despite a poor beginning." If you think you are in this group, be sure to offer some tangible evidence of your rebirth. You are not likely to impress an admission committee merely by presenting a letter that proclaims you have suddenly found yourself.

When did you earn your grades? The longer it has been since you attended college, the less accurate the reader's impressions of your school or your transcript from that time will be. It's one thing to try to have some sense of what the hard courses are at all the major colleges today. It's quite another to remember what they were in 1978! Grade inflation is a factor to be considered in this context. At one time, the average grade at most colleges was a "C." Since the 1960s, grades have been inflating gradually to a point where a "B" average is now far more common. While there is some evidence that grade inflation has leveled off, you should assess your undergraduate grades in this context. If warranted—or if part or all of your college work was completed at a much earlier time—you should discuss this matter in your personal statement. In general, you should not assume that the reader knows whatever you know, nor should you assume that he or she will see things the way you expect. Try to find a middle ground: assume that the reader is experienced with the general and broad academic matters on your transcript but lacks knowledge about you in specific areas.

Finally, do you have a graduate degree? While this is of interest, it may be less important than you think. In general, law schools find it difficult to evaluate graduate-level programs. A graduate degree can be important and relevant if it was obtained at a well-known and competitive school, but it is not necessarily a major advantage. Rarely does a graduate degree cancel out a poor undergraduate record. If you conclude that your graduate degree is important, you need to explain why on your application. If you attended graduate school recently and your grades are strong, you should try to obtain a letter of recommendation from a graduate school professor. (See Chapter 8 for more information on letters.)

■ Other Variables That Law Schools Will Consider

Basically, admission-file readers review your grades to determine (a) whether you have the motivation to satisfy the work demands and the discipline required in law school, and (b) how well you might do in law school based on your past academic performance. As we discussed above, earning high grades as an undergraduate obviously is an asset when applying to law school. High grades on your transcript usually indicate that you are motivated to achieve academic success, and that you already have been academically successful in a system that most admission-file readers believe is similar to, but less challenging than, law school. However, high grades are not enough, and can be misleading if read alone. We have already suggested that **what you take** is at least as important as **how well you do**. There are other factors that come into play when your transcript is reviewed. Several of these are discussed below.

Your major field of study. Again, traditional subjects require little explanation; nontraditional fields may require additional comments. Also, if your department is distinguished in its field or has broken new ground, you should let the law schools know about it. Try to be succinct and, as often as possible, provide documentation. Use brochures that your college publishes, letters from faculty, clippings, and other public relations material. Be as explicit as you can.

Your school's reputation. Along with your school's academic reputation, law schools may consider the mean LSAT score and the mean GPA of law school applicants from your college or university. This provides a rough measure of the academic talents of those with whom you interacted and competed in the classroom. These factors can help a law school assess your application more easily. Sometimes, however, this assessment does not work to the minority applicant's advantage. Some minority applicants have attended colleges that are not familiar to some law school admission offices. In such a case, a packet of information about the undergraduate school could help the law school admission committee and ultimately enhance the candidate's chances for acceptance.

■ Conclusion

To sum up, you will need to make decisions about whether to supplement your transcript, and then you will have to decide how to do it. It is up to you to provide the important information that does not appear on your transcript. Be succinct; you should not go into needless detail or include extraneous material. As noted in earlier chapters, each element of your admission file provides important information about you to law school admission offices, and you should take great care when assessing yourself to allow all the elements to work in your favor.

Vilma S. Martinez

Vilma S. Martinez developed an interest in law at the age of 15 when she spent a summer working for San Antonio attorney, Alonso Perales. She completed a four-year degree at the University of Texas at Austin in two-and-a-half years, before attending Columbia Law School. "Law school opened a new world of understanding of the role lawyers play in our society," she said.

After spending nine years as the president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), Martinez is now a litigation partner in one of California's leading law firms, Munger, Tolles & Olson in Los Angeles. She handles federal and state court civil litigation, including wrongful termination, employment discrimination, and insurance bad faith defense litigation.

During her tenure at MALDEF, the extension of the Voting Rights Act came before the U.S. Congress. Mexican Americans were not initially included in this extension. "Much of MALDEF's resources and personal energies that year [1975] went toward education of the Congress and presentation of our case. Fortunately, we were successful," said Martinez.

Even though she has a full-time career as a litigator, Martinez makes time to be involved in many civic and community service activities. She has served as Regent of the University of California and consultant to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. She has also served on the California Judicial Selection Commission. Recognition of her efforts has come from the American Institute for Public Service, Columbia University, and Amherst College. Martinez says thanks to a law degree she "enjoys the opportunity to make a comfortable living for herself and her family, as well as the opportunity to do something to help better the lives of those less fortunate."

Law schools will make a sincere effort to evaluate you as a person; they want to consider more than just your LSAT score and your grades. However, the resources they have to draw on in this regard are often limited and there often is insufficient staff in the law school admission offices at peak application periods.

Imagine trying to recreate a full image of yourself from your LSAT score, your grade-point average, your application, and a statistical profile of data compiled about you and your undergraduate school (this compilation, the LSDAS Law School Report, is discussed more fully in Chapter 7). Beyond the numbers, the school must rely on such things as the application form you fill out, the recommendation letters you submit, the essay you write about yourself, and whatever else you choose to send. Chapter 8 discusses in greater detail the mechanics of securing worthwhile letters of recommendation, offers tips on crafting a personal statement, and generally sharpens the focus on how to apply to law school once you have selected your schools. In this chapter, we continue our emphasis on self-assessment. We want to help you see yourself as a law school that is well-informed about you might see you. Let's take a look at some potentially significant elements in your background that you will not want to overlook. Try to think of your application as a coherent case that you are building, with each element supporting the others.

■ Work Experience And Community Service

The longer it has been since you finished college, the more important your work experience will be in your law school application. In addition to describing what you have done, you should be sure to cite specific examples of achievement that relate directly to the basic skills of lawyering: writing, analyzing, decision making, leadership, and so forth. One of the most important aspects of your work and community-service history is the manner in which it highlights those areas **outside the classroom** in which you have excelled. Merely having engaged in law-related work, however, may not in itself increase your chances for admission. Your work experience may demonstrate other important areas besides enhancement of your academic skills. It might show social commitment. It might demonstrate your ability to succeed against adversity; perhaps it shows ways in which you have been financially constrained and forced to subordinate your educational goals in order to make a living. Your work experience may illustrate your maturity, or it may give you a forum for talking about your family life and the role it plays in your life.

With respect to building your case, ask yourself the following questions: What does your work experience reveal about your academic history? Your personal background? Your link to cultural roots? To what extent are the answers to these questions of interest to the various schools on your list?

■ Extracurricular College Activities

Almost everyone who attends college full time and does not have to work participates in extracurricular activities to some degree. For many law school applicants, information about these activities is an important part of the application package, especially for those students applying to law school immediately after their graduation from college. Give some thought to which of your extracurricular activities stand out and might interest a law school. Quality, here, is more important than quantity. Certainly any demonstration of your leadership skills is significant, especially if you have distinguished yourself on a local, regional, or national level. Again, ask yourself: how does this item fit into the portrait of myself I wish to present? A good rule to remember is to **state, then evaluate**. Let the reader know the significance of your activities. Were you elected on a competitive slate? Is membership in that organization a high honor?

If you did not participate in extracurricular activities, don't rule out the possibility that the reason may be significant and of interest to an admission officer: Were financial concerns relevant? Family responsibilities? Community work outside of college? Any of these may be as important as the extracurricular activity itself.

Do not simply list the details of your history, but stay close to your goal of assessing your strengths in light of the overall picture: How can you best present this aspect so as to maximize your desirability as a potential law student?

■ Military Service

Some law schools weigh military service and achievement more heavily than others. If you are a veteran, think about how your military record can enhance your potential as a prospective law student. Perhaps your experience in the service has provided a context for you to reflect on your minority status. Keep in mind that most schools are interested not merely in the fact of your minority status but if, and to what extent, it has affected your life and your goals.

■ Parents, Relatives, And Alumni Connections

If you have a relative who attended a particular law school, you may wonder if this will influence the decision on your application. It is unlikely to hurt your application and, at some schools, it may help. As one law school dean admits: "I don't think it's in the interest of our school to go out of our way to make enemies of alumni.... There may be an institutional interest served by admitting that applicant: good will and good alumni relations might be served.... However ['the institutional interest' factor] is definitely not going to get any applicant up over the line who isn't in the admission range already." The place to mention these connections is in the application; letters of recommendation from relatives are not appropriate. It is best to check directly with the school about its policy regarding alumni connections.

■ Disabilities

Some applicants with disabilities may face a dilemma when it comes to writing about their life experiences. Obviously, you should readily acknowledge your disability if you've been able to excel academically despite a serious handicap. Likewise, if your disability is a major reason that your grades and/or LSAT score should not be considered valid indicators of your real ability, it's best to say so on your application. If you have taken an accommodated LSAT, it may be particularly helpful—to you and to the law school—to clarify the circumstances.

On the other hand, some applicants might be reluctant to write about a disability for fear of negatively influencing the admission decision. You should be aware that law schools are prohibited by law from discriminating against qualified applicants on the basis of a disability.

■ Conclusion

If you have done your research and have been thinking about yourself as you've read through the preceding chapters, you should have a portrait of yourself as a law school applicant, with a sense of where your strengths lie and what you will want to emphasize in your applications to press your advantages. Soon you will be ready to assess the law schools and find the ones you think will match your needs. Section II will discuss these areas in more detail. But first, we want to address a very important topic for all law school candidates: the cost of a legal education, and how you might offset that expense. Here again you must assess yourself and your resources, but from a much different perspective. Chapter 5 discusses some of the financial aid options available to you.

Solomon B. Watson IV

Solomon B. Watson IV graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in English from Howard University, in Washington, DC in 1966, where he was a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and the track team. After graduation, Watson served two years in the Army as a lieutenant in the military police corps. While stationed in Vietnam, Watson was awarded two Bronze Stars and two Army Commendation Medals. In 1971, he earned his juris doctorate degree from Harvard Law School.

In describing how he became interested in law, Watson said, "My interest in the law came about, first, from a general desire to help find the remedy which every wrong demanded and, second, from a desire to deal with the intellectual challenge of the law."

Watson became general counsel of The New York Times Company in February 1989 and was named vice president of the company in April 1990. He joined the legal department of the Times company in December 1974, rising from assistant secretary of the company to secretary by 1979. He was named assistant general counsel in 1984.

A member of both the New York and Massachusetts bars, Watson had been an associate in the Boston law firm of Bingham, Dana & Gould before joining The Times Company. Watson's professional affiliations include the Association of the Bar of the City of New York (Committee on Corporate Law Departments), the Legal Affairs Committee of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, the boards of Volunteers of Legal Service, Inc., and the New York Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, Inc. He is also a member of the Advisory Board of the Agent Orange Class Assistance Program.

For Watson, "the major assets of a lawyer are the skills of the profession—analysis, expression, discrimination, and mental toughness, among others. The greatest responsibility of a lawyer is to use these skills—this intellectual power—prudently and morally, so as to make a positive difference in society."

Most law school catalogs have a section on financial aid, and this is often a good starting point to gather information. The catalogs may list some of the loans discussed in this chapter; they may include other endowments specific to that particular school or geographical region. In any case, follow the instructions given in the catalog for each school to which you are applying regarding what forms you must obtain and fill out, and what deadlines you must meet. You will need to submit a need analysis report (see page 40 for discussion) to each school. When considering an applicant for admission, **schools do not consider whether the applicant has filed a financial aid application**. In fact, your financial assistance file and your admission file are maintained separately at most law schools with a different staff working on each file. This practice is referred to as "need-blind admission." Therefore, when applying for admission, do not hesitate to apply for financial aid if you need it. This chapter discusses the various types of aid and the way eligibility is determined. First, however, let us look at some expenses you can expect to incur during the application process.

■ Expected Costs *Before* You Get There

It is important that you know—and prepare for—the costs associated with applying to law school, which can run to several hundred dollars. First of all, you will be required to pay a registration fee for the LSAT, due by a specific date before you take the test. A late fee is imposed on those who register after the deadline. Second, there is a subscription fee for the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), which organizes and summarizes biographic and academic information for law school applicants. The LSDAS provides law schools with a standardized report for reviewing this information along with your LSAT score. You pay a set fee per school report ordered when you first subscribe to LSDAS, and a slightly higher fee for each school report you order after you initially subscribe to the service. (See Chapter 7 for additional information on the LSDAS.)

Plan for the cost of your research as well; you will be gathering information about the LSAT and about the law schools that interest you (See Chapter 6). You may have travel expenses (if you plan to visit one or more schools); you may want to purchase books to assist you in your planning or LSAT preparation (see pages 48 and 49 for information on Law Services publications).

Finally, each law school charges an application fee, an expense you can keep under control by doing thorough research and making informed decisions about where to apply.

Fee waivers. Law school deans or admission personnel at LSAC member law schools may grant LSAT and LSDAS fee waivers to those candidates who clearly demonstrate an inability to pay. (See page 68 for more information.) In such cases, many law schools will also waive their application fees. Consult the law school admission office for more information.

The Cost of Attending Law School

The cost of attending law school is a figure that includes tuition fees, books, and living expenses for the academic year. It can vary significantly from school to school. Tuition alone can range from approximately $1500 to more than $17,000 per academic year. When you add in housing, food, books, and daily, weekly, and monthly personal expenses, you may have a figure that is well over $75,000 for a three-year law school education.

Many minority candidates with excellent academic credentials are reluctant to apply to high-tuition private law schools because of the cost. However, these schools sometimes have more available resources for financial assistance than other schools and should not be overlooked. Also, there are many outstanding state-supported schools whose tuition usually is lower than that of private law schools. As you explore your financial resources, ask yourself what percentage of the **total** cost—tuition and expenses—will need to be covered by loans, scholarships, and work-study and what part you are able to cover through other resources. You should try to attend the **best** law school you can afford, combining your own resources with whatever financial aid you can secure.

Financial Aid: The Package Concept

Most law school applicants assume that the phrase "financial aid" means "scholarship." This is not true. A law school financial aid package may consist of several different types of aid—including grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study programs—some or all of which may be available to students **in combination** to bring the cost of attending law school within reach. Whereas undergraduate financial aid programs tend to have a higher rate of grant, scholarship, and work-study money as compared with loans, law school aid packages normally have more loans than scholarship or grants, and little or no work-study. The amount of aid you receive in each category will depend on your resources and the financial aid policy of each school. The various components are discussed below.

Scholarships

A scholarship refers to an award that does not have to be repaid. Scholarships may be given on the basis of need, or they may be awarded on the basis of merit. The terms *grant*, *scholarship*, and *grant-in-aid* are sometimes used interchangeably. The term scholarship is used in this publication to cover all three terms. Scholarships are also awarded to students in recognition of special talent. Minority applicants are eligible for a wide range of scholarships. Because the list of scholarships available to minorities is long and changes frequently, we advise you to check the sources listed in Appendix B.

Loans

Loans are amounts of money that must be repaid, usually with interest. Education loans may be awarded by the school or by private agencies. The largest student loan programs are funded or guaranteed by the federal government. Some loans—such as the Stafford Loan—are awarded on a need basis, while others—like the Law Access Loan (LAL) administered by LSAS—do not require need analysis but do require a credit check and cannot exceed the cost of your attendance. (See pages 40 in this chapter for a more complete discussion of need analysis.) Student loans differ from consumer loans in that they are usually offered at interest rates lower than consumer loan rates, and the repayment of principal and interest usually begins after the end of your educational program.

Listed below are descriptions of the five major types of loans available to law school students. Most law students borrow as much as they can through federal and school programs because they generally offer the most attractive terms. They fill any remaining need not met by these loans and by scholarships through privately funded alternative student loan programs. These programs can vary widely with respect to interest rates, repayment schedules, and other terms. Be sure to compare the terms and fees of the various private loans before you commit to any one. Also, keep in mind that you are obligated to repay all law school student loans in a timely manner.

Perkins Loan. This loan is primarily funded by the federal government and it is administered by the individual law schools. The amount you can borrow is based on a determination of your financial need and school policy. Among federal government loans, the Perkins Loan offers the lowest interest rate and the best terms for repayment; however, loan funds in this program are limited. The federal government provides Perkins funds directly to the schools who in turn administer the Perkins Loan program. If you are interested in a Perkins Loan, ask about it at the law schools to which you are applying.

Stafford Loan (formerly *Guaranteed Student Loan).* These loans are guaranteed by the federal government and are funded by lenders (e.g., banks, credit unions). The terms of a Stafford Loan are also quite favorable: the government pays the interest while you are attending law school at least half time. The amount you can borrow is based on a determination of your financial need.

Supplemental Loans for Students (SLS). These loans are also guaranteed by the federal government and are funded by lenders. In some cases, interest payments can be deferred until graduation. Although these loans are not need-based, you must first apply for a Stafford Loan to qualify. A few lenders now require credit checks for SLS loans; the financial aid office can advise you on this.

Institutional loans (or school loans). These loans are available from the law school and can carry very favorable terms; however, their availability is generally limited. The financial aid award letter from your law school will notify you if such a loan is part of your financial aid package. You should also inquire if such funding is available on appeal or in emergencies.

Private education loans. These loans are guaranteed by private, nongovernmental companies and funded by lenders. Since these loans are not government-guaranteed, they assess a guarantee (insurance) fee that is deducted upfront from the loan proceeds. This guarantee fee may be higher than the guarantee fee associated with the federal student loan program and generally ranges from 7 percent to more than 10 percent. Private education loans require a credit check before the loan is made to ensure that the borrower has a satisfactory credit history. Some private loans may either provide an option for or require a credit-worthy cosigner. The other terms (origination fees, interest rate, etc.) for these loans vary from program to program so it is important to thoroughly check out all aspects of private education loans. These loans have become a very important source of financing a law school education. Several of these programs do provide attractive overall terms.

Law Access® Loan program. This is a national loan program which provides students with practical loan arrangements. It was designed by law school professors, deans, and administrators and is administered by LSAS. Essentially, Law Access offers three types of loans, incorporating competitive terms from federal loan programs and the private marketplace. The application form is designed to allow candidates to apply simultaneously for Stafford and SLS loans as well as for the Law Access Loan (LAL). The Law Access program also offers a Bar Examination Loan (BEL) to defray the costs associated with studying for the bar examination after law school graduation. The Law Access program also provides for loan consolidation, which allows you to combine outstanding federal education loans of $5,000 or more into one new loan with an extended payment period tailored to your specific financial situation. Loan consolidation is an excellent way to control your finances and reduce your monthly loan payments. For more information, contact Law Access, Box 2500, 661 Penn Street, Newtown, PA 18940-0900 or call 1.800.282.1550.

Other programs. There are other programs available nationally through state or private lenders. Some states provide loan funds with attractive terms. Ask the schools to which you apply for more information.

Work-Study Programs

College Work-Study is a federal student aid program that allows educational institutions to hire students to work either on- or off-campus for the institution or for other eligible employers. A determination is made by the financial aid office as to the maximum amount an individual student may earn and the student may work until that amount is reached. Most schools utilize the work-study funding to support on-campus employment; for example, research assistantships, library staff, cafeteria and cleaning staff, and so on. Sometimes funding is available for off-campus work. When that is the case, a law student might be able to work, for example, as a legal aide in a Legal Services office, thereby combining earned income for educational expenses with a useful job experience. Work-Study placement is usually awarded to second- and third-year students; first-year students are expected to concentrate on schoolwork.

Financial Aid in Canada

In an effort to promote equitable representation of aboriginal people in the legal profession, the Canadian Department of Justice offers financial assistance to Métis and nonstatus Indians who wish to attend law school. Status Indians and Inuit can receive similar assistance from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Through the Legal Studies for Aboriginal People (LSAP) Program, the Department of Justice awards three-year scholarships each year. The department also provides scholarships for prelaw orientation programs and some support for graduate studies in law.

To qualify for financial assistance under the program, an applicant must be an aboriginal person (nonstatus or Métis) of Canadian citizenship living in Canada, who has received a conditional or unconditional acceptance by a law school.

■ Need-based Scholarships and Loans: How Eligibility Is Determined

Financial aid officers at most ABA-approved law schools use a standard formula to determine eligibility for need-based scholarship and loans:

(student expense budget) - (resources) = need

Once the "need" figure is determined, financial aid officers can put together a financial aid package that may include scholarship, work-study, and loan funding or some combination of the three.

Student Expense Budget

The law student expense budget covers what the law school believes are the reasonable educationally related costs to attend law school. These costs include tuition, housing, food, books, and associated law school expenses. Of course, students attending law school cannot expect to have the same standard of living as individuals who are out of school and pursuing their careers. Furthermore—in the case of individuals who pursue a legal education after spending several years in the work force—**the student expense budget will rarely cover other expenditures that may have become an integral part of the student's life**, such as car payments, credit card debt, mortgage payments, and so on. It will certainly not cover foregone income or fringe benefits.

It is not unusual for applicants to law school to have assumed financial responsibility for other family members—spouses, children, older parents, younger siblings—and it is understandably difficult to compensate for the loss of support the family will experience while the law student completes his or her education. Despite the fact that the education that he or she receives will enhance the student's employment opportunities and future earning ability, deferred gratification may be a lot to expect when others depend on you for their basic survival.

Any applicant with these circumstances should make this information available to the financial aid administrator at any law school under consideration. The administrator will work with the student to construct a realistic budget within the limits of the school's policies and federal government regulations. Financial aid legislation allows administrators to use professional judgment, given extraordinary circumstances, in making exceptions to a rule. If you feel there are factors that have not been considered in your need analysis—for example, unusually high transportation expenses (moving across the country), extended unemployment, a family illness that depleted assets—you should consider documenting your situation in writing to the financial aid office. Any changes in budget allowances or need analysis must be done on an individual basis. You should also realize that the additional aid that you may receive because of such circumstances will be, in all probability, in the form of loans that will have to be paid back.

Resources and Need Analysis

Resources are the funds that you and your family are able to contribute to pay budgeted expenses. Need analysis is the mechanism by which a financial aid administrator is informed of resources available to the student. If you are seeking financial aid, you will be asked by the financial aid administrator to submit a financial aid (need analysis) form; this form should be completed and filed with the appropriate agency (not the school financial aid office) in time to meet the law school's financial aid deadline (February 1 at most law schools). Some schools have firm deadlines, and those who apply after the date will not be considered for nonfederal student aid; consult with a law school if you need to file after the deadline. At many schools, you must apply for financial aid before you learn if you are admitted; this may mean completing more than one financial aid application. Each school to which you apply can tell you which financial aid form(s) it accepts.

Many schools also require copies of annual federal tax returns to verify financial information. (Be sure to send a **copy** of your tax return, not the original.) If you (or your parents) intend to file for an income tax extension in the year you plan to enter law school, contact the school to determine the ramifications.

Parent income. In the need analysis, parent income is weighted more heavily than assets (e.g., home equity, investments, savings). In a family with two working parents and one or two children and low assets, it is not unusual for the calculations to produce a relatively high parent contribution. This is particularly critical when the family lives in an urban area where living costs are high. The family may, in fact, have little or no financial cushion and be unable to produce the contribution indicated by the need analysis.

It is extremely important that the financial aid officer be made aware of all the information related to the demands on the family income: support of family members with special problems, work layoffs that have increased family debt, or illness. All of this information, which is held in confidence, allows the financial aid office to make a realistic assessment of your financial aid information. Inform the

financial aid office of any extraordinary financial problems in the family and, if appropriate, inquire about the appeals process.

Independent/dependent status. Applications for federally financed loans require that you state whether you are dependent on your parents, or independent. You are dependent if you are under 24 years old and will be declared on a parent's federal income tax return during the calendar year in which you apply for the loan. You are independent if you are over 24 or if you are a graduate student under 24 and are not declared on either parent's federal income tax return in the calendar year you apply for the loan. Financial assistance for dependents is based on information obtained from one or both parents as well as from the applicant. For independents who are married, financial information is required from the applicant and from his or her spouse. Schools do not have to follow federal guidelines regarding independent/dependent or marital status, or age, when determining eligibility for scholarship or other institutional aid and may require financial information from your parents. Consult with the law school to which you are applying for particulars.

Student assets. Many law schools consider all of a student's assets—that is, any savings and investments held in the student's name—to be available to cover educational expense. Other schools divide a student's assets by three and expect that one-third will be available each year. Home equity is currently considered in this calculation; applicants who are home owners should be aware of the way the financial aid office is using their home equity, a nonliquid asset, in the need analysis equation.

Student earnings. Student income is an important part of the need analysis and can impact on your eligibility for aid in a number of ways. The student's base-year income from the previous tax year is the basis of the student contribution calculation. This could be critical if you happen to be employed full time with plans to stop work and start law school. It is also critical if you plan to work part-time and attend law school on either a full-time or part-time basis. If you expect a significant change in your income after you begin law school, you should make sure that your financial aid office is informed of this change. The federal regulations allow the financial aid office the option of using estimated school-year income when there is a significant difference in these two figures; however, this is done solely at the school's discretion.

Most law schools have a summer-savings policy that outlines what percentage of your summer earnings are expected to be saved and applied to your school year expenses. For most full-time students, the summer provides the only opportunity to earn significant amounts of money. There is usually a summer-savings requirement for incoming first-year students. It is important for an applicant to determine the amount of expected summer earnings, especially when the applicant has other plans for those funds, such as paying off undergraduate loans, reducing credit card debt, or moving across the country. Here again, a frank discussion with the financial aid office could result in a more reasonable assessment of your financial strength.

Schools often calculate a contribution for students who plan to work part-time or full-time during the school year. This **term-time earnings** figure is based on your anticipated earnings, which should be based on realistic and modest earnings potential; remember that most law schools discourage part-time work during the first year.

Finally, schools vary in their policies regarding **spousal income**. They often differentiate between a working spouse and a spouse who is a full-time student when calculating any possible spousal contribution.

Other Factors to Keep in Mind

There are several factors pertaining to your individual circumstances that are significant in terms of financial aid applications.

Credit history. **Because you probably will have to borrow money to attend law school, it is very important to have a good credit history if you will be applying for a loan.** If you have been denied credit in the past—or even if you suspect a problem with your credit history—it is wise to get a copy of your credit report. Usually you can obtain it from a credit bureau in your area. Contact the bureau in writing, giving your name, address, and social security number. You may be able to get the report for free, especially if you have been denied credit recently. Otherwise, you may have to pay a nominal fee. Review the report carefully and clear up any problems that you can. Keep in mind that it takes time (sometimes months) to clear up errors or other problems, so do not wait until the last possible moment.

Outstanding debt. The federal government places limitations on a student expense budget by determining the allowable expenses. You should be aware that certain expenses—for example, consumer debt—will not be covered as an allowable budget item. Financial aid administrators recommend that students reduce high monthly payments on credit cards, car loans and related auto expenses, consumer loans, and so forth before entering law school. The financial aid officer may be able to help you plan a strategy to pay off your debt **and** attend law school.

Default or delinquency on a government loan or grant refund. Default or delinquency are two common terms which are often misunderstood. **Delinquency** occurs when you have begun repayment on a loan or other obligation and have missed one or more payment dates. Delinquencies appear on credit records and may hinder you from qualifying for an education loan that requires a credit check. **Default** occurs when a delinquency goes beyond 150 to 180 days (depending on the loan type). **This is a very serious situation.** You cannot apply successfully for federal financial aid until a default has been cleared up. Private loan funding to attend school is next to impossible to obtain following an education loan default. If you learn that you are in default on a government loan or grant refund, contact the school or guarantee agency involved. Often there are steps you can take to change your status. For example, some agencies allow you to borrow money after you make a specified number of consecutive payments on the loan or loans in default. However, you must make the payments faithfully.

■ Working While In Law School

All employment engaged in by recipients of federal financial aid must be reported on the financial aid application. Part-time and summer employment are counted as a resource and are considered in the need analysis, as discussed above. Your institutional financial aid applications will also ask you very specific questions about your intentions to work during the school year and will often provide an update questionnaire on which you must document summer earnings.

School-term jobs. Most law schools discourage first-year law students from working during the academic year, and the ABA has a standard that limits students enrolled full-time at ABA-approved law schools from working more than 20 hours per week during the school year. This is mainly because attending law school on a full-time basis is at least as demanding as working at a job full time. Many students work during their second and third years after getting themselves well grounded academically in the first year. Besides the income, the employment can provide valuable experience that supplements law school coursework. As you assess yourself, you may have to plan to work. If you must work, keep in mind that law school is more than a full-time job and certainly can demand more than 40 hours per week. To the extent that employment siphons time and energy from your ability to bring your best performance to course assignments, classroom discussion, and exams, you must approach employment opportunity with caution.

Summer jobs. Law schools not only **expect** you to work during the summer, they also expect you to apply a portion of your earnings toward your law school expenses. In fact, summer employment is an important resource that law schools use to determine your financial need and ultimately your financial aid package.

Part-time study and financial aid. It is important to note that financial aid for part-time study in law school is based on a completely different set of financial premises. Do not assume, if you have already been given a financial aid award, that it will remain the same if you decide to attend part-time. Your entire financial aid award package will be reevaluated and your eligibility for some programs may change. If you are considering such a change in plans, talk to the financial aid office first. Part-time study can be a very viable way to obtain a legal education, especially if you have substantial financial or other responsibilities—spouse, children, older parents, younger siblings, and so on. This approach is clearly one way to reduce the costs of attending law school, particularly in terms of debt incurred. In other words, attending law school on a part-time basis may allow you to finance your education on an as-you-go basis, or more nearly so. You may also qualify for employer-paid tuition reimbursement.

■ Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs)

Many law schools have developed options for their graduates who plan to enter an area of the legal profession where salaries traditionally have been lower than in mainstream corporate law practice. These loan repayment assistance programs (or loan forgiveness programs) assist graduates in the repayment of their student loans. At some schools the graduate must be employed in a public interest job; in others, the programs are related to the level of income earned. Applicants who are concerned about their ability to repay student loans should inquire about the existence of such programs at the law school. In many cases, LRAPs make the difference between financial hardship and a reasonably comfortable lifestyle for the young lawyer. Not all schools have such programs and, if you think such a program will be important to you upon graduation, you should inquire about these programs before you make your decision about which law school to attend.

■ Conclusion

When you consider borrowing money for law school, ask yourself about the potential return on your investment. Chances are it will be at least as significant as for any other financial investment you can make in yourself. In fact, the potential return on your investment should provide you with some capacity to afford the cost of borrowing. That investment will continue to pay off for the rest of your professional life. The decision to borrow as part of your law school financing plan must be seen within the context of your long-term future return.

Of course, it is extremely important that you carefully weigh your total debt, including any other education debt and any outstanding consumer debt against your ability to repay all of that debt. Financial aid administrators are prepared to counsel you on this issue, even in preadmission discussions. It is important to do this—in a completely frank and forthright manner—before you make your decision. The counselors are knowledgeable about projected debt levels and postgraduation salaries of graduates at their institutions.

It literally pays to research the facts about financial aid availability at each law school. Lack of information, misinformation, and faulty assumptions can keep you from getting the money—or getting the right mix of financial aid—as well as the career opportunity you deserve.

Section II

Researching the Law Schools

50

Rennard J. Strickland

Rennard J. Strickland is a legal historian of Osage and Cherokee heritage. He earned his J.D. from the University of Virginia in the mid-1960s and his S.J.D. from the same school in 1970. His interest in law goes back to childhood. "I was such an argumentative kid that I always remember people saying to me, 'You ought to be a lawyer.' One of our family friends, Earl Baker Pierce, was an early Cherokee lawyer. Pierce and Jack Gregory, another Cherokee who was my high school debate coach, helped me understand how important it was for Indian people to have legal help, and they encouraged me to go to law school."

Strickland speaks frankly about his law school days: "I hated law school but loved Charlottesville and the people at Virginia. The three years working on my law degree were, without question, the most horrible and dehumanizing of my life. Surviving that experience took every ounce of Osage stubbornness and Cherokee delayed gratification. I could not wait to escape from law school. It never occurred to me that I would become a law professor and never escape that environment. As a professor, I've spent the last 25 years trying to make the law school experience less brutalizing and more humanizing so that we build students up rather than tear them down."

Professor Strickland is the director of the American Indian Law and Policy Center and a professor of law at the University of Oklahoma. He has been visiting professor of Indian law at Arizona State University, Harvard Law School, the University of Kansas, the University of Florida, and the University of New Mexico. He was the original chair of the Law School Admission Council Minority Enrollment Task Force and author of the Task Force Report and Recommendations (1982). Earlier, he was a Professor at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Tulsa, and the University of Arkansas.

Professor Strickland was the editor-in-chief of the revision of Felix Cohen's *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* and the organizer of "Shared Visions," the touring international exhibition of 20th century native American painting and sculpture.

Chapter 6

Selecting Schools: Dream a Little, Be Realistic, Be Safe

Section I offered various guidelines and approaches for your first step in considering law school: evaluating yourself as an applicant. Section II will help you navigate your next step: researching and evaluating law schools so that you can see how well particular schools mesh with your self-assessment. Then you can decide where to apply.

Many minority applicants undermine their own success in applying to law school and there are two mistakes that crop up frequently. One is lack of preparation for the LSAT. This problem, and ways to counteract it, are discussed in Chapter 2. The other mistake is unnecessarily limiting the selection of law schools to which they apply. Be particularly careful about these possible pitfalls.

This chapter will help you identify sources of information that you will need to assess the various schools that might interest you; it will also show you how to narrow your choices to the schools most likely to admit you.

Bear in mind that your evaluation of a law school is only as good as the information that you collect. Furthermore, statistics as well as specific programs for particular schools may vary from year to year, so be sure your information is current. Getting the facts requires a significant investment of time and money, and demands patience and determination on your part. You are likely to hear conflicting reports about the same school; you may have to deal with pressure from your family or friends about which school to attend; your financial situation may lead you to believe that you cannot apply to the school that appeals to you. On this last point in particular, be careful not to make assumptions about what is financially possible for you; Chapter 5 discussed financial considerations in more detail.

Although all applicants experience some difficulty in choosing a law school, minority applicants can face a greater challenge in terms of research and decision making. Sometimes schools do not convey information pertaining to the particular experience of a minority student on campus in their published materials. Be aware that the guidelines for the cumulative GPA and LSAT scores listed in these schools' publications may not reflect the school's policies with respect to minority or educationally disadvantaged students. Do not automatically eliminate a school from your list of prospects based on information that does not relate specifically to minority candidates. You should try to get additional information from someone on the admission office staff, on the faculty, in the current law student body, or from alumni whose backgrounds are similar to your own. Ask them for their comments on what the school may be like for you.

■ Gathering The Data: Where and How To Find It

Law School Forums

Law School Forums, sponsored by the Law School Admission Council, offer excellent opportunities for you to meet and talk with admission professionals from across the country. Each forum is held in a central urban location, usually in a hotel meeting room. Recent forums have been held in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. Upcoming forums will be held in additional locations, such as Houston; check with Law Services for specific information. Admission to the forums is free. During one recent year, nearly all of the ABA-approved law schools were represented, and close to 16,000 people attended. Approximately 40 percent of the attendees identified themselves as minority and many of the participants had traveled over 100 miles to attend. Each forum holds information sessions for minority prospective students on application policies and procedures, law student life, and legal practice from a minority perspective. For more information about forums and related minority activities, write to Law Services, P.O. Box 40, Newtown, PA 18940-0040. The forums are open to anyone who is interested in learning about law school—college freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and those who have already graduated from college. High school students may also attend. **Again, the earlier you begin your research, the better equipped you will be to make decisions about where to apply.** You can obtain admission materials, catalogs, and financial aid information; talk to representatives of Law Services about the LSAT, the Law School Data Assembly Service, and the Law Access program; purchase Law Services publications; and view video programs that discuss issues related to law school. Programs for minority participants will enable you to get first-hand information from law school personnel, law students, and minority members of the local bar and bench.

In Canada, a similar program called Law Fair is held twice a year in Toronto. Information is available from any of the Canadian law schools.

Graduate/Professional School Days

Some colleges and universities, and some consortia of colleges and universities, sponsor on-campus visits for law school representatives as part of their graduate/professional school days. Whether you are a matriculating student or an alumnus, you should check with your university or college to see if it sponsors such local events.

Publications

Law Services publications. This book, *Thinking About Law School: A Minority Guide*, is the only comprehensive publication written specifically for members of minority groups who are interested in law school. There are a number of other Law Services publications that can help you with the law school admission process.

The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools is compiled and published by Law Services in cooperation with the American Bar Association (ABA) and the Association of American Law Schools (AALS). This comprehensive resource provides the latest data on the total enrollment of minority students and minority faculty for many ABA-approved law schools, and it presents detailed profiles of those schools, including information on the following: basic program of study/degree requirements; special programs; activities; student body; admission; expenses and financial aid; housing; placement; and minority programs. Each entry also tells you where to write or call for further information. Because it is the responsibility of each law school to update its statistics annually, Law Services cannot guarantee the accuracy or currency of this information, although every effort is made to assure that information is correct. You may want to supplement this guide with other material—for example, the law school catalogs. The *Official Guide* provides statistical graphs for about two-thirds of the schools showing admission patterns for the previous academic year based on GPA and LSAT score. For additional admission information, contact the law school admission office.

Financing Your Law School Education covers all aspects of financial aid, including loans, grants, and scholarships. It also contains an important section on debt management.

If you are interested in applying to Canadian law schools, consult the *Law Services Information Book—Canadian Edition*, available free of charge at all law schools and many undergraduate schools, or from Law Services, Box 63, Newtown, PA 18940-0063.

Other publications. Use public libraries, bookstores, prelaw advisors' offices, or college career counseling centers for additional publications. Plan to spend a morning or an afternoon at any of these places to which you have access. You will probably find much useful information, though you will have to use your own judgment as to the quality and reliability of individual sources. Guides based on anecdotal student interviews may provide you with a perspective not commonly found in the law school brochures and catalogs. Some possible titles of interest are listed in a selected reading list included in the *Official Guide* (see above). Selections of particular interest to minority applicants are included in Appendix B.

Some books compare law study with other graduate programs, while others guess how law schools rate against each other. Still other publications simply solicit data from the schools or accept paid advertisements from them. The only way to tell how helpful a book is for your own purposes is to browse through it yourself before you decide to use it as part of your research.

Your Undergraduate College: The Prelaw Advisor

The prelaw advisor at your college or university can be an important research source. If you already are an alumnus of your school, you should still feel free to visit or contact the prelaw advisor at your alma mater. He or she can provide practical and college-specific information that will assist you as you sort through the maze of law schools in the United States. For example, advisors can help you

determine if you are accurately assessing your chances for admission to a particular law school. They can identify the law schools that have accepted alumni from your college or university with academic profiles similar to yours. They even may help you with the mechanics of the application process—by letting you know about current LSAT and LSDAS fees and deadlines, for example.

Generally, a prelaw advisor is most knowledgeable about (a) law schools in his or her region, and (b) those schools that have accepted graduates from your college in the past. Therefore, you should have some idea of **where** you want to go and why before heading into the advisor's office. You should not expect a prelaw advisor to be knowledgeable about the programs at every law school in the country. **The specific research work is still up to you.**

Keep in mind that it is really not the advisor's job to tell you where you should attend law school. Prelaw advisors are most helpful in pointing you in the right direction and helping you clarify your goals.

The Law Schools Themselves

Bulletins and catalogs. A bulletin or catalog can provide concise summaries of the general information you need to evaluate a law school. Like *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*, catalogs are a good place to begin your research. Although some catalogs may provide substantial information relating to minority students and support programs, no catalog can tell you everything you need to know about student life on campus. You are more likely to find that information by talking to prelaw advisors, and law students, law professors, and law school alumni—especially minority alumni. You may obtain a law school catalog by calling or writing to the school's admission office. Catalogs may be available at local public libraries as well on request.

Some law schools publish brochures directed to minority applicants; they usually give an overview of law school policies and summaries of programs targeted toward minority students. These brochures, which may assist you with specific questions, are available from law school admission offices and the minority organizations at those schools.

Videotapes. In addition to catalogs, some law schools make available free videocassettes about their program. If the school's catalog does not refer to such a videotape, ask the admission office if one is available.

On-campus interviews. Law school representatives often visit individual colleges and universities to interview potential applicants or talk about their law schools with groups of interested students. Check with your school's prelaw advisor to see if any law schools conduct on-campus interviews or visits at your school or alma mater.

Law school admission office. Most law school admission offices are quite willing to assist you with your research in a variety of ways. Some will even give you an idea of your chances for admission based on a summary of your credentials (that is, undergraduate transcript, LSAT score, personal factors such as work history, minority status). However, some may be reluctant to speculate about such matters over the phone or even in person.

In any case, you may want to consider visiting at least one law school that interests you. Such a visit can give you a clearer picture of the geographic location as well as an intuitive sense of the school population, perhaps helping you to determine your comfort level in a particular school environmen. A visit gives you an opportunity to talk personally with administrators, students, faculty, and various minority student associations. It also allows you to inspect the physical facilities, including educational, professional, and recreational resources.

A site visit may be costly if a law school is not close to where you live, but it may be a worthwhile investment. Even if you can't afford the time or money to visit the schools that interest you in the early stages of your research, you should certainly try to set aside the resources to visit any school you are seriously considering, especially once a school has made its decision to admit you.

Some schools hold special on-campus recruitment programs for minority applicants or admitted candidates. You can inquire about these programs and the availability of funds for meals and transportation by contacting the law school admission office.

■ Assessing Your Chances for Admission to a Particular School

After pursuing the research recommended in this handbook, you should be able to place yourself in one of three categories: likely admit, likely reject, or anybody's guess. The last of these categories simply means that whether or not you get in will depend on what is in your file beyond your LSAT and GPA. Keep in mind that an important variable in any admission year is the size of the law school applicant pool. Some years there are just more applicants than others at a particular school, which means more competition for every seat.

As a starting point, examine the charts in Appendix A to see how individuals with scores and grades like yours fared in the admission process in one recent academic year. The charts indicate the number of applicants, by specific minority groups, who applied and who were accepted nationally for the year 1990-1991 based on GPA and LSAT percentile. Use these decision profiles as a guide. Then investigate further by speaking to a prelaw advisor and to the particular law school's admission office.

In a typical year, approximately 75 percent of minority applicants with LSAT percentile ranks of 25 and above and with grade-point averages of 2.5 and above (on a 4.0 scale) are admitted to law school. Your percentile rank (discussed on page 19) will be reported to you along with your test score.

We want to emphasize again that, although your research may disclose that your LSAT score is not consistent with the law school of your dreams, your research can still be a source of helpful information to you in assessing the best law schools for you. Remember that your long-term goal is not merely to get into law school but to succeed there and become a lawyer.

Law schools, like any institution eager to recruit the candidates they deem best, try to present themselves in the most favorable possible light. The best sense of how likely you are to be admitted is how you compare to students like yourself currently attending the institution. You may want to make inquiries of the admission office about matriculated students' LSAT scores and GPAs.

■ Using A Three-point Strategy

Once you collect all your information, what should you do with it? We urge you to apply to more than one school, and use the following criteria: Choose at least one school that your research certifies as a school that is likely to admit you, at least one school where your research tells you that you will be in the mainstream of the minority applicant population, and at least one school that you would love to attend but whose LSAT scores and GPAs are somewhat higher than your own, according to your research.

Dream a little. It is certainly reasonable to apply to one or two schools you greatly admire—even if your chances for admission are not especially solid. We encourage you to do this. Often your self-assessment can be unduly strict. The schools may well think more of your abilities and experience than you do yourself. If you have done a good job of supplementing your academic credentials with a clear and compelling personal essay—remembering to highlight important factors such as special accomplishments, work-related experience, and so on—you may realize your dream. Then you will be in a position to decide whether you really want to attend that school—whether it really is, in fact, the embodiment of your dream.

Be realistic. Send your applications to schools where your chances for admission are solid. Again, have a sound self-assessment and do your research, and you will have a good idea of which schools these are.

Be safe. Finally, it is extremely important to apply to at least one "safe" school. Generally speaking, this is a school in which your GPA and LSAT score fall within the top fifth of prior minority applicants. Applying to a safe school is more than just a security measure. Even one acceptance letter can greatly ease the tension, especially if you are anxiously awaiting news from your "dream" or "realistic" choices. Moreover, a complete evaluation of all your choices may lead you to conclude that the best investment of your time, energy, and money may be with one of your safety schools. Remember to choose all of your schools, even your safety schools, with care, and consistent with your research.

It is never too early to find out about the schools that may interest you, but it isn't time to decide which ones to apply to until you complete your self-assessment as an applicant and your research from among the sources we've named. We recommend you adopt this strategy of applying to schools in all three of the above-discussed categories because all law schools are highly selective institutions. At some schools, there are well over 20 applicants for every seat, and almost all of those applicants could attend the school. As you set out to learn about schools that

interest you, therefore, you should also be thinking about how interesting you seem to them. Try to develop a realistic sense of how attractive you are to the schools to which you may want to apply. Doing so may yield some surprises.

■ Narrowing The Choices

Once you have identified a group of schools that seem reasonable possibilities in the dream/be realistic/be safe spectrum, evaluate more closely whether you might really want to attend those schools. Now is when you have the most control—**you** will decide where to apply. Later, the pendulum will swing back to the schools, as each decides whether to admit you. You should cast a wide enough net to maximize your chances of being admitted to a broad range of schools. If all goes well, and with a little bit of luck, you will have several attractive options after law schools make their admission decisions.

In no particular order, there are four areas that should concern you when finalizing your decision about where to apply. They are:

- locale
- school reputation
- school atmosphere
- cost

You should be gathering information about these areas during this exploratory stage of school assessment. The information will be valuable again when you ultimately select the school that you wish to attend. Financial considerations were addressed in Chapter 5. Below is a more detailed discussion of the other three areas.

Locale

When assessing where you will apply to law school, it is important to keep an open mind with regard to location. Try to put quality and cost considerations before location, at least initially, in selecting schools that interest you. Doing so will rapidly expand your chances to obtain a legal education.

If moving would disrupt your children's education, or if you own your own home, you may conclude that a local law school is best suited to your circumstances. However, unless you are locked into an area without choice, do not be inflexible; give some thought to law schools that don't necessarily meet your preferences with respect to location. Applying to a school a long way from home may actually improve your chances of admission in some cases; geographic diversity of the student body is one admission criteria that just might tip the balance in your favor. You can always narrow down your

choice—once you are faced with a choice—and use geographic preference as a criterion later. However, if those preferences dictate your research now, you may exclude interesting law school options and you will foreclose any later assessment of them.

Locale is the easiest area to learn about. No law school keeps its location a secret. Still, knowing where a school is, and having a real feel for the place, may not always be the same thing.

Even if a law school is within daily commuting distance, you should still spend some time thinking about its location. If the school is in an unfamiliar area, you may want to write to the local chamber of commerce or ask the school for literature about its locale. Keep in mind that such literature will almost always give you the best spin on the place; a more realistic assessment might come from a friend, relative, or acquaintance who lives there or has lived there or knows someone who lives there. Local organizations that are connected to ones with which you are already affiliated (fraternities, clubs, civic associations, and so on) may also be helpful in this regard.

Reputation

Reputation can be something objectively measurable, or it can be based on an institution's unique characteristics. Let's examine a few of the areas that may contribute to a law school's reputation.

Accreditation. The most important accrediting body in U.S. legal education is the American Bar Association (ABA). All ABA-approved law schools have the same reputation to the extent that they all meet the ABA standards for accreditation. We strongly recommend that readers of this guide first consider those schools that have been approved by the ABA. There are other law schools that are either accredited by their state bar associations or not accredited at all. We discuss these differences in Appendix D, and we strongly urge that you read that Appendix if you are seriously considering making application to a school that has not been at least provisionally approved by the ABA. The Federation of Law Societies of Canada has equivalent importance for that country's law schools.

Canada has two legal traditions, the French civil-law tradition dominant in Quebec and the English common-law tradition dominant in the provinces and territories. In order to practice law in Quebec, it is usually necessary to obtain a civil-law degree from a law school in Quebec or in the civil-law program of the University of Ottawa. To practice law in common-law jurisdictions, it is usually necessary to obtain a degree from one of the common-law law schools referred to in the *Information Book—Canadian Edition*. More detailed information about requirements for practicing law can be obtained from the various provinces.

"National," "regional," and "local" schools. In the United States, law schools have been variously described as national, regional, or local. Whatever the appellation, all ABA-approved law schools are, in effect, national because they are all required to teach a more or less standard curriculum, maintain a specific level of library holdings, and employ faculties with reasonably diverse academic and professional

experiences. Furthermore, all law schools are available to any applicant from any geographic location. These descriptive terms—national, regional, and local—are most useful in describing the geographic diversity of a law school's applicant population. A **national** school will generally have an applicant population and student body that draws almost indistinguishably from the nation as a whole and will have many international students as well. National schools usually have the most information about employment opportunities across the United States. A degree from such a school can maximize your opportunities in the legal profession across the nation and may lower some of the initial hurdles you may face as a new graduate. Obviously, most schools like to think of themselves as "national," but you should be aware that some schools are more national than others insofar as their student bodies are more representative of the nation as a whole. Also, many schools may be more national than you think they are. Check the school's catalog or talk with the admission and placement staff to get a clear breakdown of where the students come from and where they are finding jobs. A **regional** school is likely to have a population that is primarily from the geographic region of its location. Usually, regional schools have students from other regions as well, but fewer than a national school. In a regional or state law school, more of your classmates will be your lifelong associates in the practice of law. This could be advantageous in your career as a lawyer.

Generally speaking, a **local** school is primarily drawing on applicants who either come from or want to practice in the proximate area in which the school is located. Many local law schools have excellent reputations and compete with the national schools in salaries, in research-supporting activities, and in resources generally.

Alumni success. The quality of success achieved by minority alumni ought to be an additional basis for assessing a law school's reputation. Consult with alumni associations at the particular school for more information. Many minority student organizations keep up with minority alumni. An increasing number of admission offices also have information on minority alumni. In any event, all law schools have some form of alumni office that attempts to keep track of the law school's graduates. Try to locate at least one such person. The effort may add immeasurably to your store of information about the law school.

Faculty. A law school's reputation may be based partly on faculty reputation. Most law school catalogs give summaries of their faculty members' backgrounds—where they received their undergraduate, law, and any other degrees, previous employment, publications, and so on. As a minority applicant, you may want to explore this information at particular schools that interest you. According to a 1990-1991 ABA survey, full-time minority faculty represent only 9.5 percent of all full-time faculty in law schools overall and only 9.2 percent of all part-time faculty overall. But this can vary widely: about a third of the schools have no minority faculty; about a third have one minority faculty member; and about a third have **two or more** minority faculty members. Each of the four historically black law schools (Howard, North Carolina Central, Southern, and Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University) has a faculty that is more than 50 percent African American, but only 5.7

percent of all law school faculty are African American. Statistics like these will matter more to some applicants than to others. Decide which are important to you and be aware of as many different factors regarding a school's reputation as possible while making your school assessments. For school-specific information on this subject, consult *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*, published by Law Services, particularly the section "Key Facts for Minority Law School Applicants."

Academic standing. One of the more fundamental ways of analyzing a school's reputation is the law school's average LSAT and GPA—that is, the average score or grade-point average of the entering class. The conventional view is that the higher the average LSAT and GPA, the more competitive the reputation of the law school. A law degree from schools with more competitive LSAT and GPA entering classes might give you a competitive edge in your search for some types of employment, mainly because the more prestigious private employers are likely to recruit most heavily from the schools with the most competitive reputations. Furthermore, many law students find that the high level of competition stimulates and challenges them to greater levels of achievement; others do better in an atmosphere where they are competing with students on the same academic level as themselves. The best law school for you must be decided on the basis of your comprehensive self-assessment, thorough research, and thoughtful evaluations: a competitive school, a school with an outstanding reputation with respect to admitting and graduating minority students who passed the bar, and the best law school for you based on the aforementioned three factors may or may not be the same thing. Only you can make that determination, and you are not likely to make that determination based on a single factor like reputation.

Complicating matters is the fact that every school tries to present itself in its own best light, and every law school has unique qualities. Be careful of law schools that overstate their own reputation and remember that a law school may not be totally objective in this regard. Again, you will be best served by listening to people whose goals and experience are as close to your own as you can find.

Whatever you decide, we urge you to dream a little, be realistic, and be safe when deciding where to apply. Leave the final selection on which school to attend for later. You can always narrow the spectrum before you actually mail your applications, but you will never revisit a point in the application process where you can broaden the spectrum to the degree that you can while you do your research.

School Atmosphere

Once you matriculate, you will be in the law school and its environment for many of your waking hours from Monday through Friday. Chances are that you will spend some portion of some Saturdays and Sundays there as well. Therefore, it is important that you learn about the particular environment of the school you are considering before you get there.

Your inquiry ought to include what it is like to be a minority student in a class at the law school you are researching. Conduct your research beyond the mere number of

minority students enrolled at a particular school. Find out the percentage of minority and majority students. (School-specific information is updated annually in *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*. See "Key Facts for Minority Law School Applicants.") What is the atmosphere like? You should learn what it is like for minority students who choose to participate in extracurricular academic and social activities sponsored by the law school. If there are minority student organizations—such as the Black Law Student Association (BLSA) or the Hispanic Law Student Association (HLSA)—it may be helpful to learn what they are and to what extent they engage in academic and social activity as well as minority community activity outside the law school.

Following are some questions you may want to explore:

- What is the graduation rate of minority students compared to that of majority students?
- What is the attrition rate of minority students compared to that of majority students; in other words, what is the dropout or failure rate over three years?
- Is there a minority retention program?
- Is academic support available? To what extent, and from whom?
- Does the school have a summer prelaw school component?
- Is there a stigma attached to receiving help at the law school?

Check to see if there are minority faculty, administrators, and law school staff members at the law school, and how many there are. You may be concerned about the availability of role models and potential mentors, which may lead you to be concerned about diversity within the school. A law school whose faculty, administration, and staff are varied with regard to race and gender may well be demonstrating its institutional commitment to diversity through its faculty hiring and tenure process. Faculty members and administrators often spearhead various law school programs. If there are orientation and academic support programs available at a law school, chances are a minority faculty member or administrator participates in or has knowledge about them.

Find out what kind of employment opportunities are afforded minority students through the law school placement or career development offices. Some law schools participate in local, regional, and national programs designed to catalyze minority presence in the legal profession.

Whom do you talk to about this particular facet of your assessment? First, check with the admission office; it can respond directly and can also put you in touch with alumni. Representatives at the Law School Forums are another source of information;

often a minority faculty member, administrator, or student will be a representative there. If it is possible to visit the school you are researching, you can ask when you are there. For employment information, the best sources are probably the minority law students and the placement or career development office itself. Speak with alumni, especially minority alumni. All alumni may be able to answer some of your questions, but minority alumni—especially recent graduates—have experience from a specific perspective that may interest you; also, their perspectives are filtered by the bar examination and post-law school employment.

■ Conclusion

Once you have researched and evaluated a number of law schools, you are likely to face some tough decisions. For example, you may find that the most attractive school is located in a town or area unknown to you. You may have to decide between going to a state-supported school where you are currently living and a private law school in another state that would cause you to incur more debt. You may have to choose between a better-known school and one that may not be as well-known but whose environment, minority programs, and financial and academic support systems are more attractive. However, being admitted to too many schools is a better situation than being admitted to too few or none. Err on the high side when it comes to deciding how many applications to send out. You really can't be sure that you don't want to relocate, or attend a private school with a higher tuition—and you won't resolve the question of how to measure a law school's reputation in terms of your future—until after you learn what school or schools admitted you.

Diane C. Yu

Diane C. Yu, a 1977 graduate of the Boalt Hall School of Law of California—Berkeley, serves as general counsel to the State Bar of California in San Francisco. Yu grew up in upstate New York, the daughter of physicians. "I imagine my parents might have expected me to become a doctor, but I've always been more comfortable with words than I have been with science," she said.

Yu studied Chinese and taught English at Tunghai University in Taiwan following graduation from Oberlin College with a major in East Asian studies. While working and studying in Taiwan, Yu wrote to five former professors at Oberlin, asking their advice in charting the future course of her career path. Four of the five professors wrote back suggesting, independently, that she pursue law school. "That was in the mid-1970s when few women were in law," recalled Yu. "My professors thought I'd find the study of law fulfilling and challenging. They were right. I found law school a rigorous, intellectual environment, and—surprisingly—the courses that I thought I'd enjoy the most turned out to be the ones I enjoyed the least, and vice versa. I never thought, for instance, that I'd love constitutional, corporate, and criminal law, but I did."

For that reason, Yu says she would advise a prospective law student to go into law school with an open mind and not feel compelled to make any decisions about the areas of law they're most interested in right away. "I had no preconceived notions and I think I was richer for it," says Yu. "I had never met a lawyer, never talked to anyone who had been to law school. I had never even seen *The Paper Chase*," she chuckled.

Yu shared her insight on the inherent value of a legal education. "Looking back on my experience, I'd suggest that most people would benefit from at least the first year of law school," she said. "It teaches you the analytical approach to problem solving, gives you an appreciation for language and the meaning of words, and—more than that—learning about the law gives you an understanding of one's rights and remedies. That's important for any citizen to know. We have an imperfect justice system, but it's better than anything else we know."

■ The Necessary Paperwork

The law school application process involves the completion of a number of forms over a period of time. Some of your correspondence will be directed to Law Services in Newtown, Pennsylvania—who acts as your liaison to the law schools for some of the required forms—but the law school application itself must be obtained by you from each individual law school to which you will apply. It will be up to you to mail that application directly back to the law school admission office when you have completed it.

Forms To Be Completed By Applicant

Below is a descriptive listing of the types of forms you must complete. Except for the individual law school applications, these forms can be found in the *Law Services Information Book*, which can be obtained through undergraduate prelaw advising offices, law schools, or Law Services in Newtown, Pennsylvania. The *Information Book* also discusses any fees that apply. **Be sure to type or clearly print all information unless you are otherwise instructed.**

Law Services order form. Use this form to register for the LSAT and to subscribe to the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS). (See below for more information.) You need not do both at the same time. Use law school application deadlines to determine when you should begin your 12-month subscription to LSDAS.

Transcript request forms. Send these forms (found in the *Information Book*) to all undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools where you have completed coursework and received academic credit. You should have completed at least six semesters of undergraduate work before requesting that transcripts be sent to Law Services. **Transcripts must be sent directly from the schools you attended to Law Services. Transcripts received from candidates directly will be returned unprocessed.**

Law school application matching forms. You must include an application matching form with every application you send to a law school. The application matching form functions as the school's request for your LSDAS Law School Report.

Academic record form. Complete this form if (a) you have attended more institutions than can be listed in the LSDAS section of the Law Services Order Form, or (b) you are unable to obtain a transcript from an institution you have attended. Submit the academic record with your completed order form.

Law school application form. You can obtain this form by writing directly to the admission office of the law school to which you are applying. Application fees vary from school to school.

The sample application schedules shown in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, respectively, will help you organize a schedule for the completion and mailing of the appropriate forms. Give yourself sufficient time to fill out all forms accurately and fully. Notice that one

figure outlines a schedule for candidates who plan to take the LSAT the October or December prior to the fall in which they expect to be admitted to law school, and the other figure is designed for individuals who plan to take the LSAT several months earlier, in June. Law school application deadlines vary, but most schools suggest applying as early as possible. The schedules shown in Figure 8.1 and 8.2 are examples only. It is important for you to prepare your own timetable based on the application deadlines for the law schools to which you apply.

Figure 8.1:
Using the October or December Test for Fall Admission

August/September		October/November	December	January
Prepare for the LSAT ↓ Research law schools — select those to which you will apply ↓ Compose a schedule of application deadlines ↓ Register for the LSAT and subscribe to LSDAS ↓ Receive an LSAT Admission Ticket	Receive a Law Services Activity Update that indicates commencement of LSDAS ↓ Send transcript request forms to undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools. (Once Law Services receives official transcripts it takes approximately two weeks to process them.)	Take the LSAT ↓ Receive your LSAT scores ↓ Register for December LSAT, if applicable ↓ Receive a Law Services Activity Update that indicates receipt of official transcripts	Send application to law school(s)—include application matching form ↓ Take the December LSAT	Receive December LSAT scores ↓ Receive a Law Services Activity Update that indicates LSDAS Law School Report has been sent to law school(s)

Figure 8.2:
Using the June Test for Fall Admission

April/May	June	Late July/August	September	October/ November	November/ December
Prepare for the LSAT	Take the LSAT	Receive your LSAT scores	Subscribe to LSDAS	Take the October LSAT, if repeating the test	Receive October LSAT scores
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Register for the LSAT	Receive a Law Services Activity Update	Research law schools—select those to which you will apply	Send transcript request forms to undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools. (Once Law Services receives official transcripts it takes approximately two weeks to process them.)	Send application to law school(s)—include application matching form	Receive a Law Services Activity Update that indicates LSDAS Law School Report has been sent to law school(s)
↓		↓	↓	↓	
Receive an LSAT Admission Ticket		Compose a schedule of application deadlines	Update that indicates commencement of LSDAS	Receive a Law Services Activity Update that indicates Law Services' receipt of transcripts	
		↓			
		Register for the October LSAT, if repeating the test			
		↓			
		Receive a Law Services Activity Update			

Forms To Be Completed By Law Services

Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) provides a means of centralizing and standardizing undergraduate academic records to simplify the law school admission process. The LSDAS Law School Report is the complete report to each law school on each law school applicant. It contains:

- biographic information
- a year-by-year, college-by-college summary of your undergraduate grades and credits
- photocopies of each transcript sent to Law Services

- your current test score, previous reportable test results since June 1987, up to 12 (including cancellations and absences), and an average LSAT score
- photocopies of your most recent LSAT writing samples, with a limit of three
- an admission index (see Chapter 9 for more explanation) if requested by the law school
- special documents, such as a letter from a certified professional regarding a disability or a letter from Law Services regarding conditions during a particular test administration

As soon as all your undergraduate transcripts have been received and summarized, Law Services will send you a Master Law School Report—your copy of the LSDAS Law School Report. It enables you to check the biographic and academic information that will be provided to law schools. Any error should be reported immediately to Law Services.

Law Services will send an LSDAS Law School Report in response to an Application Matching Form sent by a school to which you have applied, **if your file is complete.** For your file to be complete, it must contain the following:

- payment for LSDAS service or an LSDAS fee waiver (see page 68)
- a reportable LSAT score
- the summary of all undergraduate transcripts from schools listed on your order form

■ Steering Clear of The Common Pitfalls

Read Directions Carefully to Avoid Clerical Delays

Take the time to read and understand all the material in your *Law Services Information Book*. Many applicants fill out their Law Services Order Form incorrectly because they have not followed all the directions. The LSDAS Law School Report contains the LSAT score; law schools will not review your application without your score. Any delay in registering for the test—and any subsequent delay in the mailing of your LSDAS Law School Report to the law schools you selected—will cause a delay in your admission decisions.

If you neglect to have all your undergraduate, graduate, and professional transcripts sent to Law Services, you may also delay the prompt review of your file. For example, you must send Transcript Request Forms to all schools where you were enrolled. These include your degree-granting institutions as well as those

from which you have transferred or schools where you were enrolled in summer sessions. A law school report cannot be produced for you until all of your undergraduate work has been received and summarized by Law Services. You are required to list on your Law Services Order Form all institutions that you have attended. If Law Services learns that you have not acknowledged your attendance at an institution on your Law Services Order Form, a notation of "unacknowledged transcript" will appear on your LSDAS Law School Report, alerting the law schools to this fact. In that case, the law school may delay an admission decision until it receives your transcript from all those schools where you completed coursework.

Comply With Deadlines

The application deadline for each law school is usually listed in the school's catalog. Carefully note the distinction between the filing deadline and the completion deadline. The **filing** deadline is the date by which the law school must receive your application form. The **completion** deadline refers to the date by which all other application material must be received. Some schools do not specify a completion deadline.

It is not uncommon for a school to extend its completion deadline as long as it has received your application by the filing deadline. Be aware that deadlines for law schools with spring semester first-year admission, and deadlines for part-time programs, may differ from those of the conventional program.

Above all, avoid problems at the initial stages of the law school application process. You will save yourself the trouble of trying to correct an error later, when you might have to get in line behind several thousand other callers and letter writers requiring assistance from Law Services and the law school that received the error.

Apply Early

There are several reasons to complete and mail your applications to law schools and take the LSAT as early as possible after you complete your self-assessment and research. First, you will have more time to fill in any gaps in your application file. Second, you might have more time to evaluate the schools that have accepted you—or to apply to other schools that you had not previously considered. Third, you will reduce the chance of a problem or error in paperwork, which can delay the review of your application. Admission offices are usually flooded with paperwork at the application deadline. Early applications can mean early decisions for some.

If you apply early, it is likely that you will be competing for more first-year seats. On the other hand, a late application may be reviewed more stringently because already admitted applicants have reduced the number of available seats. **There is never any penalty for applying early.**

There are additional advantages to applying early. As you await decisions in early spring—and sometimes early summer—you will find the period for applying for and receiving financial aid shortens. You also have less time to search for housing. You won't have the option to file additional applications at other law

schools until the next admission cycle. Rather than limit your options in all these areas, it makes good sense to file your application as early as possible.

Consult the sample application schedules shown in Figures 8.1 and 8.2 and apply early in the admission cycle of each law school that you select. What is considered early differs from school to school, so inquire at each school where you intend to apply.

Be Familiar with the Schools to Which You are Applying

Admission procedures vary from school to school. Learn the specific forms and procedures at each school. Try to get materials as early as August or September of the year before you want to begin. As soon as you select the schools to which you expect to apply, read the catalog and review the application instructions carefully. If you are uncertain about procedures, call the admission office.

Many law schools also admit applicants based on predetermined goals. For example, some state-supported schools are mandated by their state legislatures to admit a predefined percentage of students from their particular state. Contact a prelaw adviser or law school admission officer for information that is specific to the law school.

Apply to a Number of Schools

Earlier in this book we urged you to dream a little, be realistic, and be safe when applying to law schools. We meant it. Don't narrow your options too early in the process.

If more than one type of school appeals to you (small vs. large, urban vs. rural, church-affiliated vs. nonsectarian), try to apply to more than one of each. Each school you apply to is one more possible option you may have later, when you must make your final decision about where to enroll. For example, you may apply to a school in which you only have modest interest because your research suggests it is "realistic" or "safe." Then, the school makes it clear that it is very eager to have you attend; they admit you and offer you a very attractive and unanticipated financial aid package. You may find yourself taking this school a little more seriously than when you originally selected it as a possibility. It is hard to predict this at the time of application.

Be Honest and Follow all Norms of Good Conduct

Law schools expect your language to be your own, and they expect your answers to their questions and your personal statement to be direct, honest, and complete. Understand that you are not simply dealing with one office at one school; the choices you make can affect your entire professional career and can become part of a record that follows you wherever you go.

Each year a number of applicants destroy their future careers in law by trying to cut corners in the application process or attempting to press some wrongly

perceived advantage. A finding of misconduct can alter permanently any chance for admission to law school. Don't make this mistake in judgment.

Adhering to the norms of good conduct does not simply mean you shouldn't lie or cheat. Some things that you may consider perfectly acceptable may be unacceptable to the law schools. Adopt law school rules and standards. Failure to do so can result in any or all of the following: closing of an admission file without a decision on admission; revocation of an offer of admission; dismissal from law school through a school's internal interdisciplinary channels. The following acts constitute applicant misconduct:

- false statements or omissions of information requested on the Law Services Order Form, or on individual law school application forms
- falsification of letters of recommendation, transcript information, school attendance, honors or awards, or employment
- any misleading act or omission, whether intentional or unintentional, on any form or in any statement

Sometimes an act of misconduct can be committed unintentionally. Therefore, it is wise to review each step of the admission process thoroughly as you complete it. In fact, it pays to review each step several times. The care and time you take before you submit an application can save you a great deal of trouble down the road.

■ Other Valuable Resources

For Applicants with Disabilities

Law school admission personnel and prelaw advisors are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about—and sensitive to—disability issues. Nonetheless, applicants with disabilities may need to make a special effort in the application process. There are two organizations that can help. The **HEATH Resource Center** operates the **National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Handicapped Individuals** as a program of the American Council on Education. (HEATH is an acronym for **Higher Education and the Handicapped**.) HEATH can be reached at One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-1193. In the Washington, DC metropolitan area the center's phone number is 202.939.9320; outside DC, the number is 800.54.HEATH. (Both numbers are Voice/TDD.)

The **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)** is a nonprofit organization of persons from all 50 states, Canada, and other countries committed to promoting the full participation of individuals with disabilities in college life. The association can be reached at P.O. Box 21192, Columbus, OH 43221-0192, 614.488.4972 (Voice/TDD).

The AHSSPPE and the HEATH Resource Center have collaborated to publish a booklet called *How To Choose a College: Guide for the Student with a Disability.* Although it is oriented toward the high school student, this publication contains much valuable information for the prospective law student who has a disability. The booklet, written by Jane Jarrow and others, is available at no charge from the HEATH Resource Center. HEATH also makes available a number of publications on various topics related to students with disabilities.

LSAT and LSDAS Fee Waivers

In cases of genuine economic hardship, it is possible to forego payment of fees for LSAT registration and LSDAS subscription. If you need to obtain a fee waiver, you must explain the financial hardship in writing to a law school admission office. All the law schools function as agents of the Law School Admission Council by authorizing fee waivers for the LSAT and the LSDAS. You may submit your request for a fee waiver to any law school that is ABA-approved. **You should submit this request to a law school well in advance of the application and test registration process, as schools have limited resources for waivers.** For more details, consult the *Law Services Information Book.*

Depending on the law school, you may also forego payment of your law school application fee in cases of extreme hardship. Consult the law school admission office at each law school for application fee waiver information.

Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO)

One support program with a long history of helping economically and educationally disadvantaged applicants is the Council on Legal Education Opportunity, or CLEO. Each year CLEO accepts approximately 210 applicants nationwide and places them in an intensive summer program conducted at seven law schools. Top students in the CLEO program are often recruited by various law schools throughout the country and are awarded a scholarship of approximately $11,000 for living expenses over three years. For some law school candidates with marginal credentials, completion of CLEO is a requirement for admission. CLEO offers an excellent opportunity for some minority applicants. However, the program usually does not notify CLEO applicants about admission to the program until late May or June of the year in which they intend to enroll in law school. For further information, write to CLEO at 1800 M Street, NW, Suite 160, South Lobby, Washington, D.C. 20036 or call 202.785.4840.

The Law Services Candidate Referral Service (CRS)

Another important way to improve your chance for admission to law school is the Law Services Candidate Referral Service (CRS). This may be especially useful if you are not sure where you want to apply; **you have the option of letting the law schools choose you**.

It works like this: The CRS allows a law school to search the LSDAS data file for applicants whose credentials meet its particular standards and student profile. Depending on the school, applicants may be recruited on the basis of racial, ethnic, economic, and geographic background as well as GPA and LSAT score.

To participate in the CRS, simply check the appropriate space on your Law Services Order Form. Law schools may then contact you with an invitation to apply. Such an invitation indicates that the school considers you a **likely** candidate for admission; however, an invitation to apply does not **guarantee** admission. If the school appeals to you, it is wise to submit an application form as soon as possible.

Don't worry if you do not receive inquiries from schools of interest to you. Some schools do not use CRS extensively.

■ What About Personal Interviews?

Very few schools offer **evaluative** interviews as part of the application process; however, almost all schools welcome and encourage your visit and will have someone available to talk with you. If you have questions about evaluative interviews that are a factor in your admission, it would be wise to check with the school on its interview policy and find out what role interviews play in the evaluation process. We must emphasize here that both faculty and admission staff are busy people with lots of demands on their time. They also, of course, care about you and your application. Try not to seek them out as a way of leaving no stone unturned, but only if you have questions that are not being answered, or if you feel that you have a specific point that can only be made in person. If either of these apply, request an appointment. Nevertheless, we caution you strongly to view your application in its entirety, and to treat a personal interview as one element in that whole. If a particular school permits an interview, and you can afford the time (and sometimes cost, if travel is necessary), then by all means do it. Even if comments resulting from the interview are not formally included in your file, your visit may demonstrate your interest in the school.

Conclusion

Law Services will send you an Activity Update each month that some activity occurs in your file—for example, when a transcript has been received at Law Services, or a report has been requested by a law school to which you have applied. Be sure to closely monitor your LSDAS status and double-check the accuracy of all data whenever you have the opportunity to do so.

Because your personal statement (requested by schools as part of your law school application) and your letters of recommendation can frequently tip the balance in your favor, we devote the next chapter to exploring these two areas of the application file—and to the ways you might maximize their impact on a law school's decision about you.

Roy Watanabe

Roy Watanabe was born in Hawaii in 1947 to a Japanese family. After graduating from Columbia College in New York City in 1969, he taught English and math to high school dropouts in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. While attending Columbia Law School—an experience he described as "truly humbling"—Watanabe spent his free time working at the West Harlem Legal Services office. He spent his summers working on environmental issues in Honolulu. "Whatever confidence I had in myself was utterly overshadowed by being around enormously gifted people. Lots of them." Presently he is a member of Spivak, Lipton, Watanabe, Spivak, & Moss in New York City.

Watanabe's practice covers a wide range of labor and employment law issues and a broad cross-section of labor organizations that historically have not been represented, including writers in television and the motion picture industry, actors performing on the live stage, technicians in TV, screen, and stage, Broadway press agents and managers, traffic enforcement agents, New York City administrative employees, law clerks to city judges, bakery truck drivers, cake and bread workers, and telephone company technicians.

Reflecting on his law school days, Watanabe recalled, "It was wonderful training. There were a couple of truly gifted teachers and really gifted friends. The kind of learning that goes on in law school has the tendency to narrow one's perspective. The other consequence is that it hones one's analytical skills, if you have them to begin with. It's sometimes hard to retain perspective. You focus so much you sometimes forget the more important, global perspective. I think it's unavoidable. It happens in other professions as well."

What about the benefits of his law school education? Watanabe says, "I've gotten to do what I set out to do—tilting at windmills, David and Goliath. People without power need someone to speak for them. The downside is that it's a burdensome profession. Grueling. Extremely demanding, a jealous wife. Saps energy. Not always extremely rewarding financially or emotionally, so make sure you have a cause. That's what makes it worthwhile."

Chapter 8

What You Say Counts: Your Personal Statement and Letters of Recommendation

We have been urging you to take charge of the admission process, to research the ways you appear desirable to particular schools, and to shape your applications in light of your recent preparation.

Why? Isn't the application process simply a matter of answering the questions that the schools ask? Certainly, it can be that. But if that is all you do, then you give up the largest part of your chance to have an impact on which schools admit you. Therefore, think of each application as something that you are crafting with a *shape* and a *direction*.

Think of this task as a combination of planning and advocacy, the two skills most central to a lawyer's work. You are the one who gets to make the case; don't waste the opportunity.

Use your recent self-assessment and the research you did about schools to decide which elements to include in each particular application. Here is where you begin to build your case.

■ Assembling and Summarizing The Evidence

Each school only knows as much about you as can be surmised from your application file. Things that may seem obvious to you will be absolutely unknown to admission readers unless those things are **in your file**. The LSDAS Report presents only the sketchiest numerical and demographic information; your report could be similar to that of many other people. If schools are going to have any detail about who you are, they will have to learn it from you. In Chapter 4, we discussed the specific areas about you that may be pertinent. However, each reader will have only a limited amount of time to spend on your file. Therefore, you must engage in the same sort of careful consideration in which a lawyer engages when presenting a complex oral argument within a strictly enforced 15-minute time limit. He or she must figure out what issues are likely to be important to the judge, muster the best defense, counter the best arguments against the case, and try to package it all in a way that is understandable and that will be plausible to the judge.

Approach your application the same way. Review your file as would a reader who doesn't know you. This reader will go through tens, or hundreds, or even thousands of files like yours; he or she will be legitimately skeptical of any self-serving praise that you might write. Moreover, this reader is on guard—and rightly so—against the admission of any student who will be unable to complete the program of law study at his or her law school.

Most schools will either solicit a personal statement from you or ask an open-ended question. They may invite you to add anything you feel is relevant to your application. Always try to be responsive to the requests a school makes. Be brief and to the point. Do not exceed word limits if they are specified. The law

school application is designed to create a level playing field by asking all applicants to write on a connected theme; how you do this will tell the reader much. If you have obviously xeroxed the same essay for every law school, it may tell readers that you don't really care about **their** school.

Stick to the facts, and be as well organized as possible. It is in your interest, as well as the school's, that the reader reach an accurate conclusion about whether you can do the work. Allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusion. Your job is to **lead** the reader without pointing out where you are heading every couple of seconds. If you are successful at this, the reader will follow your lead.

You may be creative—within the bounds of the assignment. Even if the law school seems to discourage extra submissions, if you've got something to say, you should say it and submit it; the readers can always choose whether or not to include it in your file.

Coordinate your written statement with your letters of recommendation. Prepare a list of points that you wish to make—for example:

- your commitment to your community
- the ways in which a particular job demonstrated your abilities to do the work of a lawyer
- the leadership role you played in an extracurricular activity
- the fact that during your worst college semester you had to work a double shift
- the ways in which your early education may not have prepared you for the LSAT
- the fact that an article you wrote was published in a national magazine

or **whatever** it is that stands out or that provides important background explanation for a part of your file. Next, allocate each of those points to different parts of the application. Your personal statement and the letters of recommendation are the vehicles you have available to you to complete these important tasks. Try and figure out which particular points can be best communicated by one or more of the people who will write a letter on your behalf. Clearly communicate to that person that this is an area you would like him or her to address, and allocate the remainder of the items—and the overview—to your personal statement.

The key is to think of the application as a whole, and to figure out how each part contributes to the overall picture you want to paint. This portrait should be painted with honesty and simplicity; it should focus on **you**—in the most favorable light for the particular school that will be viewing it.

■ The Personal Statement

Use the personal statement to add facts that are not already part of the file, and to bring facts together that are otherwise lodged in very different places in your file. For example, you may want to explain why you selected certain people to write your recommendations—if it isn't obvious from the letters they write. You may want to point out that a job you discuss in one part of your application took place at the same time as a particular semester on your transcript.

You are trying simultaneously to add information and create structure. Out of these two, a character (you) and a story (why you should be admitted) will build themselves. If the reader builds the analysis autonomously, the story will seem that much more compelling. Your job is to try to build your statement in such a way that there can only be the analysis that you aim for. **Be brief, be factual, be comprehensive, and be organized.**

We suggest crafting a distinct essay for each school to which you apply. Sections may overlap, but the point is to think about what you have learned about **that** school, and figure out what you can tell them that will set you apart.

Be specific and concrete. Don't just list your special experiences; explain them and give examples. For instance, suppose you were raised in an economically disadvantaged area, yet have managed to excel in school while working to help support yourself; or suppose you have contributed to the social or cultural enhancement of your community. Be sure to do more than just state it; **describe** the thing you are talking about (the job, your family, or your upbringing) briefly but concretely. You are a story teller here. You want a living person—**you**—to emerge. Similarly, be specific when you write about your academic and extracurricular achievements. If you were named to an honorary organization, for example, "President's Scholar," explain that you were one of five in a class of 2000. If you write that you were a member of a club in college without explaining the purpose of the club or your role in it, you will do little to help anyone figure out who you are or what you've done.

Style and tone. Your personal statement is, among other things, a writing sample. It should reflect your ability to write clearly and concisely; it should be grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. Of course, the statement is far more than a writing sample; otherwise, you would be permitted simply to send in an example of your best writing in lieu of a statement. The statement is your opportunity to become vivid and alive for the reader, and it is an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to write and present a prose sample in a professional manner.

Type the statement, if possible. Presentation makes a difference. Details such as this are not critical, so you shouldn't worry if you are unable to submit a typed statement, but it is one element that contributes to the crafting of your total application. It decreases the chance that the reader will struggle through handwriting. Use of a word processor may make a long statement appear shorter. All of these things contribute to tone and form.

Because the statement is at least indirectly a writing sample, it must be your own. But that doesn't mean you have to write in isolation. It is a piece of prose that you care about; you can certainly discuss it with others, show them drafts, ask them to help you edit it, spell-check it with a computer (or a person, or a dictionary), and solicit suggestions from anyone whose judgment you trust. Nevertheless, the ideas and the language must be your own.

One good rule of thumb is this: write the drafts yourself. If you have obtained significant help from anyone else, you may want to consider describing the nature of that help briefly in a note at the end. (For example, "In writing this essay, I asked my prelaw advisor to read it and make suggestions and asked an English professor to work with me on the style and grammar.") Doing so will bolster your credibility, demonstrate your modesty, and allow the reader to form conclusions both about your writing ability and your ability to work on your writing.

■ Letters of Recommendation

Not all schools require letters; some schools discourage them. Our view is this: they can't hurt. Properly chosen writers, who write with appropriate content and tone, will fill in the picture of you and will do so in a way that is more objective—and therefore more credible—than your own statement can be. The reason some schools discourage letters of recommendation is that the letters sometimes do not serve those ends: be sure that yours are the exception.

Admission readers will notice a letter that tells a bit about the author of the letter (What makes the author seem authoritative, objective, and expert on the subject of you?), a bit about you (What concrete qualities about you does the writer emphasize in his or her letter?), and a detailed comparison of your ability to other individuals the writer knows who have applied to law school, preferably to the law school in question. Sometimes an effective letter may actually mention the names of past successful students that the writer has recommended, comparing the new applicant favorably to the prior student. In any case, a reference puts his or her reputation on the line to the extent that he or she makes forceful and direct assessments of your ability. Such a letter cannot help but be noticed.

It is not inappropriate for you to sit down with the person whose support you are seeking, and discuss your specific goals for the proposed letter with them. They will more than likely welcome your input to give them a sense of what they might write. Let the letter writers know what you want them to touch on, and encourage them to do so while being brief. Let them know that even though praise is welcome, it is more effective when it's part of an interesting anecdote that helps paint a portrait of who you are. It is perfectly acceptable to assist your letter writers by supplying them with resumes and any other information that might help them write about you more personally. It might also be helpful to give them a copy of the personal statement you write for your law school application.

Don't be reluctant to ask someone for a letter of recommendation. You would be surprised at how willing many people are to write on your behalf, and how detailed an impression you may have made without anyone ever noting it. On the other hand, writing a good letter of recommendation does require some effort as well as a rather detailed sense of the applicant. Not everyone will have the time and inclination for this effort, and if someone expresses reservations you should take the hint. You do not need references who write lukewarm letters. Finding the right people—those who know you, think highly of you, and are willing to write about you concretely and enthusiastically—is what counts. If you can find someone who may care enough to write specifically to the law school to address what is distinctive about each school, so much the better.

We do not recommend ghostwriting letters of recommendation, even if your reference sources pressure you to do so. The style won't be theirs, and neither will the insights. If a person won't write on your behalf in his or her own words, consider asking someone else instead. Also, be certain that any personal relationship between you and the letter writer is disclosed.

Letters on your behalf are submitted and held in confidence by the law schools. As an applicant, you do not have access to the letters written on your behalf. Your opportunity to review them comes only after you have matriculated, at which point you have—as a matter of federal law—a right to review your school records.

Who should write letters of recommendation. Seek letters from those who know you well rather than from people of prominence who know you less well. Letters from well-known people (elected officials, prominent alumni) who are unfamiliar with you or your work should be avoided. They are disfavored and can create the wrong impression.

Because law schools are academic institutions interested in your academic potential, at least one letter should come from a professor—even if you have been out of school for some time. Often such a professor is one who taught you in your major field of study. The faculty member whose recommendation will most help your chances for admission is:

- someone who knows you well;
- someone who knows your academic potential;
- someone who has written letters of recommendation for former students admitted to the law school under your consideration; and
- someone who is willing to compare you favorably with those former students.

Letters from employers can also be valuable, especially if you are a college graduate when you apply. The best letters cite specific examples of your intellectual ability as well as your academic skills, such as the ability to write, analyze, and make difficult decisions about complex matters. They may also

convey a sense of who you are as a person, and what other important skills you bring to your work—such as discipline, responsibility, and persistence. Letters from employers should tell a bit about who they are and how they know you; they should describe your strengths by giving examples of the way they have observed those strengths. Comparisons to others may be useful here as well.

Select your writers in part because of the specific things they can add to your application. General praise is not much help.

Some schools are quite particular about the sort of person you should solicit for a recommendation. Follow the school's instructions, if there are any. You can always add other letters that don't fit the mold.

If a school wants you to use a particular recommendation form, your writers should fill it out. One law school's evaluation form asks the letter writer to assess the applicant in terms of the following 10 personal qualities:

- Esteem in which you are held by your peers
- Esteem in which you are held by faculty or other supervisors
- Ability to communicate orally and in writing
- Emotional stability and maturity
- Ability to work with others
- Leadership potential
- Creativity (including ability to see implications and synthesize ideas)
- Industry, initiative, motivation
- Judgment
- Honesty, integrity, trustworthiness

For each category, the writer is asked to rate the applicant as "extraordinary," "outstanding," "above average," "average," "below average," or "no basis for judgment." Because most letters of recommendation tend to be positive, it is in your best interest to select a reference source who will consistently place you in one of the first three rankings. Any rating less than "above average" will fail to make your application stand out favorably to admission personnel. Writers can append anything else they want to say. They should balance the need to be comprehensive with caution against making your file burdensome to read.

If you have particular reasons for including specific recommenders' letters in an application, you can always flag those reasons in your personal statement. Always give the schools what they want, but if you think a different format or approach is more favorable, you can provide that as well.

Additional tips. Letters addressed to "To Whom It May Concern" are acceptable, but not preferable. Law school admission-file readers can easily conclude that a duplicating machine and a postage stamp was the maximum effort that the applicant was willing to expend. If possible, each letter should be personalized; even if you don't have the name of the person to whom the letter will go, you can at least include the full name and address of the particular law school on the letter as part of the heading.

Be certain that your writers mail their letters of recommendation as early as they can. Sometimes a stamped, self-addressed envelope can assist them in filling your request more speedily. If you request a recommendation early enough, you will have more time to ask someone else—if your first choice is unable or unwilling to comply.

■ Conclusion

Both the personal statement and the letters of recommendation are your chance to influence the law school's impression of you beyond the statistical information of the LSDAS and the brief responses that comprise your law school application form. Approach this task as you would if you were a lawyer already. The assignment involves both planning and advocacy; again, what you are doing is stating your case.

Once you have completed all of these steps for all of the schools to which you are applying, you deserve a rest. Conveniently, you probably have the time to take one, at least in terms of the admission process, because the ball is now in each school's court. They have to read and review your file and compare it to hundreds or thousands of other applications. Although you may well want to remain in occasional contact with the schools during this period, there really is comparatively little for you to do at this point other than sit back and wait until you have heard from all the schools, and you are ready to make the very important decision of where to enroll. In the meantime, it should help to have some idea of what the schools are doing. The next chapter describes, in a very general way, how the admission process works.

Keith C. St. John

Keith C. St. John worked his way through undergraduate school, at one time leaving school for a year to work 15 hours a day at three different jobs. He graduated from Vassar College in 1981 with a degree in economics.

His path to law school followed a stint at the Institute for Policy Sciences and Public Affairs at Duke University. "Having both studied public policy analysis in graduate school, and worked as a legislative assistant for a member of Congress, I was very much interested in learning the law—the theory and philosophy of jurisprudence—so that I could become a legislative analyst and, maybe even, a legislator," said St. John, who is now an alderman on the Common Council for the City of Albany in New York.

St. John, who is also an associate attorney with Walter, Thayer, & Mishler, P.C., knew from the beginning what he wanted from law school. "My activities working with and for people to improve the quality of their lives was what really got me through three tough years of law school. Empowering the disenfranchised was what I wanted to do most."

St. John credits his academic training, including law school, with significantly improving his ability to speak out on important issues and to analyze an issue and articulate a position on that issue. "Success in law school was not measured by high grades but, rather, an ability to express myself, both in writing and in speech. Going to law school certainly made me a stronger person."

While in law school St. John announced his homosexuality. He claims to have made national history in the fall of 1989 by becoming the first openly gay black elected public official in the United States.

In his private practice St. John concentrates in the areas of matrimonial and family law, disability law, civil rights and personal injury litigation. He is also active in the New York State Bar Association, serving on the Access to Justice and the Legal Aid Committees.

St. John is involved in many organizations, including the Albany Chapter of Citizen Action of New York, The AIDS Council of Northeastern New York, the Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless, and the South End Task Force. St. John is the Capital District Lesbian and Gay Community Center's representative on the Albany Police-Community Relations Board.

Chapter 9

Behind the Scenes: The Admission Office

What Do Law Schools Consider?

We have already discussed the various elements of your application as they relate to maximizing your chances for admission. Law schools do not all make admission decisions in exactly the same manner, and they do not all require the same information. Nevertheless, there are certain practices that are common to almost all schools. At this point in your application process, you should have read each catalog carefully so that you meet all the requirements on your first effort. Let us pull together all those elements we have discussed, and some that we may not have touched on, and list them here as specific criteria that law schools consider when making admission decisions:

- Your Law School Admission Test score
- Your undergraduate grade-point average and transcript
- Your undergraduate course of study
- Graduate study, if any
- Your college
- Improvement in your grades and grade distribution
- Your college activities, both curricular and extracurricular
- Your minority status
- Your moral character and personality
- Your letters of recommendation
- Your written essay and/or personal interview
- Significant activities since you graduated from college, such as work experience
- Your state of residency
- Your motivation to study and reasons for deciding to study law
- Finally, anything else from your file that might make a member of the admission committee sit up and take notice.

Your LSAT scores and your GPA and transcript are significant factors at just about all law schools. Those two numerical scores reflect whether you are in the range of competition at a school. Unless your numbers are consistent with a law school's admission standard, you will not be seriously considered by that school. Some schools combine your LSAT score and your GPA into an index, which is calculated by a simple formula. This index, often based on the performance data of past students, is a basic, preliminary admission-sorting device. It doesn't say much about you as an individual, but it suggests your comparative ability to perform competitively in that law school. A number of schools do not use a numerical index.

Many prospective law students believe that the LSAT and GPA scores seal their fate. Although some law school admission officers share that view, others point out that so many good applicants have the same range of grades and LSAT scores that it's impossible to narrow the field using those two criteria alone.

Some law schools place some weight on personal interviews, although the number doing so is very small. Others do not under any circumstances grant interviews and some will not even read letters of recommendation. Some assign numerical values for undergraduate scholastic, social, and athletic activities, although this practice is the exception rather than the rule.

■ When Are Decisions Made?

Most law school admission decisions are made sometime between December and June. The law schools that receive the largest number of applications start making decisions earlier than those that receive fewer applications, although there are exceptions to even this rule. Inquire specifically at each law school about its particular admission cycle.

A small number of schools offer "Early Decision" admission programs. By applying through the early decision program, you are telling a particular law school it is your first choice and, if you accept its offer of admission, you will withdraw your applications from all other law schools and attend that one. Early Decision offers are made early in the year and the offer can include a demand for a deposit prior to the April 1 deadline observed for regular admission. The advantage of such programs is that you complete the admission process early and can begin planning for law school, knowing where you will be enrolling. If you don't get admitted "Early Decision," you continue in the regular admission process.

■ How Are Decisions Made?

Your admission to law school will be a product of several decisions. It is typical for law schools to sort applicants into three groups: the Admits, the Rejects, and—the largest group—the Holds (or We're-Not-Certain-Yet group).

You are an automatic admit if you more than fulfill the school's admission standards. If you are an automatic admit, you will be accepted shortly after your file is reviewed.

If your file is not sufficiently competitive, you may face elimination from further consideration at this initial step. The full admission committee may not even examine these files because many fall below the school's standards. However, other schools read every file with care, regardless of numerical predictors, and elevate to the "Hold" category applicants with lower predictors whose other credentials (personal statement, work record, etc.) command more extensive review. Applicants with credentials just below the top (or automatic admit range) are often reviewed more extensively by an admission committee consisting of faculty (and sometimes student) members. This committee usually sorts the middle group into "admit," "deny," or "wait-list" categories. Their decisions are rarely guided by GPA and LSAT score alone. It is here that all of the factors that make up the applicant file are weighed.

Within the admissible applicant pool that is not automatic, admit decisions are made on the basis of who best meets the law school's comparative standards. Some of those candidates are placed in the hold category. Others may be wait-listed.

Hold List

An admission committee may be unable to make an immediate decision about an admissible applicant's file. It may, therefore, place the applicant on hold, although not all schools use this category. If you are classified as a hold, your application is, in effect, in a holding pattern, pending the acceptance or rejection of admission offers by admits. According to one law school bulletin, an applicant is placed on hold if he or she "does not quite meet the standards of those currently being admitted, but has strong qualifications that indicate possible admission later in the season."

If your file is on hold, you will probably learn about your admission decision later in the admission cycle than you would hope. Keep in mind that if a law school places you on hold, it may admit you. Also, good self-assessment, careful research, and applications filed early in the cycle can insure that some schools will admit you early. Then you can decide whether you want to wait and see if you gain admission to a school where you are on hold.

Some law schools notify applicants that they are on hold. Others do not. If you receive no communication from a law school in the period that the school tells you is the normal time for applicants to be admitted, you should not hesitate to call that law school's admission office.

Waiting List

There is an essential difference between the hold and the wait-list categories. If you are placed on hold, you will be considered for available first-year seats. If you are placed on a wait list, you will only be considered for a first-year seat if an admitted student or a hold decides not to attend the law school. If no seats become available, no one from the wait list will be admitted.

Before admitting from its wait list, a law school first must determine if it has available seats. That determination is usually made at or near the end of an admission cycle, generally in the summer. If you are on a wait list, don't expect to hear from the law school definitively until that time.

Wait-list and financial assistance. Wait-list applicants often are not considered for school-based financial assistance because that aid has already been committed for the year. If you get admitted from a wait list, speak with the financial aid director immediately so that you can learn about whatever aid may be available and what deadlines you must meet. Permitting yourself sufficient time with your self-assessment, your research, and your planning can insure you that you have other law school options besides the wait list. Keep in mind that what can be admit or hold at one point in the timing of an admission cycle could be hold or wait list at another. Why? Some admission decisions are made as early as the beginning of the cycle at many law schools. As applicants are admitted during the cycle, there are fewer first-year seats to fill. The later the review, the stiffer the competition for the remaining seats. With the increase in competition and the drop in available seats comes more delay in learning the decision on your application.

You may want to check with the admission office about the volume of applications. If the volume is heavier than in preceding years, there will be greater competition for every first-year seat throughout the admission cycle. On the other hand, if the volume is about the same or down from previous years, it is likely that the competition will be the same as or less than in previous years.

■ Who Are the "Admission Readers"?

At some schools, the initial decisions are made by the chief admission officer. He or she may be titled associate dean, assistant dean, or director of admission. At other schools, a committee composed either exclusively or primarily of faculty members will make all admission decisions. At many law schools, a committee will make most of the admission decisions and the admission director will be a member of that committee. At some schools, the admission personnel may also have authority to admit those with the most competitive LSAT scores and GPAs and/or deny admission to those with the least competitive LSAT scores and GPAs. There are some schools in which the admission staff make most of the admission decisions. If you would like to know how the decisions are made at a particular law school, ask a representative of the school.

■ Conclusion

You have assessed yourself, prepared for and taken the LSAT, and filed and completed your application early based on your research. The next chapter suggests some things to consider as you decide where to enroll.

Section III

The Verdict Is In: Now What?

Marilyn V. Yarbrough

Marilyn V. Yarbrough had already had a career as a systems engineer and a family by the time she went to law school at the University of California at Los Angeles, an experience she describes as "an interesting and intellectual experience. I enjoy puzzles and complexities. The classes on income tax, corporate law, and remedies were my favorites."

Yarbrough sees the benefits of a law school education as "allowing you to take advantage of many opportunities. Teaching. Practicing. The corporate world. A law school education is a good education for doing a lot of things."

She began her post-law school career in 1975 as a teaching fellow at Boston College of Law and progressed to Dean of the College of Law at the University of Tennessee. Her public service activities include the Pulitzer Prize Board; the Tennessee State Advisory Committee for the United States Commission on Civil Rights; the Board of Directors for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Inc.; and Board of Directors and Executive Committee, United Way of Knoxville.

Is there a downside to life after law school? "People's expectations are different when they know you're a lawyer," Yarbrough said. "They expect you to have the answers to all law-related questions and be able to advise them, even if you are not equipped to do so."

Chapter 10

The Letter Arrives! What's Next?

You're at the end of the process. At least one school, or possibly more than one, has sent you an acceptance letter. Now all you have to do is select one.

When you make your choice, be sure to let the other law schools know that you will not be enrolling. Law schools have waiting lists. If you are not going to matriculate, there is another applicant who will. Prompt communication also may enable you to receive a full or partial refund of any seat or housing deposits or other fees that you paid.

■ Seat Deposits

Many schools use seat deposits to keep track of their incoming classes. For example, a school may require an initial acceptance fee which is credited to your first-term tuition if you actually register at the school; if you do not register, the deposit may be forfeited or partially returned.

If you decline the offer of admission after you've paid your deposit, a portion of the money may be refunded, depending on the date you actually decline the offer. Some schools will not refund the deposit.

The Law School Admission Council states: **"Except under early decision plans, law schools should permit applicants to choose, without penalty, among offers of admission and financial aid until April 1. Admitted applicants who have submitted a timely financial aid application should not be required to commit to enroll until notified of financial aid awards that are within control of the law school. Every accepted applicant should be free to deal with all law schools and to accept an offer from one of them even though a deposit has been paid to another school."**

Because seat deposits vary widely, it is best to contact law schools for information before you apply. Some schools ask for more than one deposit depending on when you are admitted. Some have abandoned seat deposits and simply ask you to inform them of your likelihood of enrolling. They will ask you to reconfirm your decision periodically. This system is based on the honor of your word.

School policies also vary with respect to deadlines for submitting seat deposits or confirmation of enrollment. To ensure compliance with these policies, make sure you understand each school's deadline and whether that date represents a "postmark" or "actually received" deadline. Failure to comply with deadlines can have serious consequences. Any questions you may have about school policies can be clarified by contacting the admission office immediately upon notification of your acceptance.

If You Must Change Your Plans: Deferrals

Some schools permit you to defer your acceptance to a future year. That is, they allow you to put off starting your law studies by one or more semesters. Other schools insist that if you don't want to start when you said you did you must file a new application. The rules for deferment vary. Some schools will not require a reason to defer your entrance; others will do so only for specific reasons they consider compelling. At some schools, your credentials will determine your eligibility to defer enrollment. If you decide to defer your first year at law school, be sure to notify the law school admission office promptly.

What if you suddenly develop second thoughts about the one law school that accepts you or the school you have selected? You do not have to settle for the wrong school just because it sends you an acceptance letter. Consider the alternatives. What if you postponed your legal education for a year? What if you reconsidered your application strategies and came up with a new list of schools to which you could apply? If you find yourself in this sort of situation, you may well benefit from a conversation with an admission professional at a school that you feel more solidly drawn to, even if you have not yet applied there or even if you had applied before and been rejected.

Transferring After the First Year

It is unwise to accept an offer of admission at one law school with hopes of transferring to another that rejected you. While it is possible to transfer from one law school to another, standards for transferring are usually higher than initial admission standards and are based on first-year performance. If you feel that you absolutely must transfer to another school, find out about the school's admission standards for transfer students.

Making The Final Selection

Assessing financial assistance. Law schools today recruit and admit minority candidates. In fact, some highly qualified minority applicants find themselves caught in "bidding wars" among several law schools that are anxious to have them enroll. If this happens to you, be very careful. An attractive financial aid package is a very important factor, but should not be the sole basis for deciding what law school to attend. Remember the factors discussed in Chapter 6.

Assessing the level of academic support. You will want to feel confident about the prospect of your success at the school you are examining. One important factor may be the level of academic support the school will provide. Some schools may invite or even require you to participate in a pre-enrollment summer program to sharpen your academic skills.

Assessing other factors. In addition to academic support, the level of social support, assistance with career placement, and bar passage record of graduates are also significant. If you have done your homework on the schools that have accepted you—following the guidelines outlined in Chapter 6—you can make a careful choice.

■ If You Don't Get Admitted

If your applications fail to produce an admission letter, you should review your self-assessment process. Perhaps you did not include a "safety" school. While law schools rarely identify in your rejection letter why you were not admitted, a call to the admission officer can be useful in establishing the basis for the decision. This discussion can also be helpful in determining if an application in the future would likely have the same result. Would retaking the LSAT make a difference, or would the results of your final semester's work (if strong) tip the balance?

■ Conclusion

If we've succeeded in doing what we set out to do in this book, you are now closer to considering law school as a realistic possibility. You've asked yourself some important questions, methodically assessed yourself as a candidate, and prepared—or perhaps begun—to do the necessary advance planning (and paperwork) in pursuit of your goal. Once you begin law school, of course, your task will be to maintain the same drive and energy you've harnessed in researching and applying to law schools and apply it toward your studies once you've matriculated. Your work is not over: it has only just begun.

We hope we have answered many of your questions or at least guided you toward the best source for the information you seek.

You may return to this book as a reference during the months ahead, while you are preoccupied with the absorbing task of researching, writing, and sorting out your various papers as well as your thoughts on this matter of law school. If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed with the tasks at hand, listen again to the voices of the individuals whose stories appear throughout these pages. Let their voices guide and inspire you. Seek out others like yourself who can also share their own experiences with you. When the time comes, perhaps you too will serve as a guide and inspiration to someone who wants to follow in your footsteps.

Appendices

American Indian Applicants to Law Schools for the Year 1990-91

	LSAT Percentile Ranks																					
	0-10		11-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80		81-90		91-99		Totals	
	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm
GPA																						
3.75-			3		2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2			1	1			3	3	16	12
3.50-3.74	1	1	1		2	1	4	1	6	4	4	2	2	2	4	2	8	8	4	4	36	25
3.25-3.49	1	1	7	5	5	3	6	3	5	4	9	8	6	6	7	7	8	8	7	6	61	51
3.00-3.24	4	1	9	3	15	7	10	8	11	7	13	10	10	8	7	6	8	6	1	1	88	57
2.75-2.99	14	2	12	5	16	4	10	8	8	5	11	8	12	10	9	6	5	3	3	3	100	54
2.50-2.74	14	1	13	6	20	13	7	4	12	8	13	9	9	6	3	3	9	9	4	3	104	62
2.25-2.49	15	2	6	5	11	7	4	2	4	1	3	3	3	3	2	1	2	2			50	26
2.00-2.24	12		4		5	1	4	2	2		1	1	3	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	35	9
2.00	3		3	2	1		2	2	1				1				1	1			12	5
No GPA	9	1	4	1	1		3		1		2		3	1							23	3
Totals	73	9	62	27	78	38	53	32	52	31	58	43	49	37	34	27	43	39	23	21	525	304

Apps = Number of Applicants
Adm = Number Admitted

Black Applicants to Law Schools for the Year 1990-91

	LSAT Percentile Ranks																					
	0-10		11-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80		81-90		91-99		Totals	
	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm
GPA																						
3.75-	15	9	13	9	14	13	9	9	8	8	5	5	8	8	6	6	3	3	5	5	86	75
3.50-3.74	51	20	44	34	37	27	35	30	21	19	22	22	14	14	16	15	17	17	10	10	267	208
3.25-3.49	125	37	115	67	82	63	53	46	51	48	33	33	30	28	27	27	25	25	24	24	565	398
3.00-3.24	247	69	209	108	188	145	93	79	70	60	71	66	45	41	32	29	35	32	25	23	1015	652
2.75-2.99	364	69	274	117	222	142	117	89	92	82	85	76	58	52	26	25	34	32	17	17	1289	701
2.50-2.74	507	66	362	121	248	128	122	89	106	82	70	55	49	42	22	21	28	25	16	14	1530	643
2.25-2.49	505	54	308	88	231	120	105	72	65	45	45	40	32	26	17	16	22	22	6	6	1336	489
2.00-2.24	425	26	201	47	116	38	52	23	63	41	31	24	19	12	8	7	8	7	1	1	924	226
2.00	165	5	56	7	32	5	23	7	12	3	4	4	3	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	300	37
No GPA	293	8	98	12	81	11	31	3	20	7	14	4	7	1	2	1	5	2	2		553	49
Totals	2697	363	1680	610	1251	692	640	447	508	395	380	329	265	226	157	148	179	167	108	101	7865	3478

Apps = Number of Applicants
Adm = Number Admitted

Chicano/Mexican American Applicants to Law Schools for the Year 1990-91

	LSAT Percentile Ranks																					
	0-10		11-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80		81-90		91-99		Totals	
	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm
GPA																						
3.75-	**2**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**1**			**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**5**	**4**	**7**	**7**	**30**	**25**
3.50-3.74	3	1	2	2	10	4	5	5	7	6	12	11	5	5	7	7	14	14	13	13	78	68
3.25-3.49	**6**	**1**	**10**	**4**	**23**	**12**	**14**	**9**	**20**	**16**	**13**	**11**	**16**	**14**	**12**	**12**	**16**	**16**	**10**	**10**	**140**	**105**
3.00-3.24	20	3	35	14	33	13	33	24	29	25	26	21	19	15	15	14	22	21	10	10	242	160
2.75-2.99	**36**	**4**	**27**	**9**	**45**	**19**	**25**	**18**	**29**	**23**	**18**	**17**	**17**	**14**	**10**	**9**	**16**	**13**	**5**	**5**	**228**	**131**
2.50-2.74	30	3	37	6	26	13	18	9	28	18	16	12	18	16	10	7	14	13	2	2	199	99
2.25-2.49	**30**	**1**	**25**	**5**	**26**	**3**	**9**	**2**	**11**	**5**	**9**	**3**	**7**	**4**	**1**	**1**	**5**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**125**	**28**
2.00-2.24	22	1	17		8	2	6	2	6	3	3	1	2	1					1		65	10
2.00	**8**	**1**	**5**	**1**	**3**		**2**				**1**	**1**			**1**						**20**	**3**
No GPA	8	1	8		4	2	3		3		4	3									30	6
Totals	**165**	**17**	**170**	**43**	**181**	**70**	**116**	**70**	**133**	**96**	**105**	**83**	**87**	**72**	**58**	**52**	**92**	**84**	**50**	**48**	**1157**	**635**

Apps = Number of Applicants
Adm = Number Admitted

Hispanic Applicants to Law Schools for the Year 1990-91

	LSAT Percentile Ranks																					
	0-10		11-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80		81-90		91-99		Totals	
	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm
GPA																						
3.75-	**3**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**5**	**2**	**8**	**6**	**10**	**9**	**3**	**3**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**12**	**13**	**13**	**14**	**14**	**82**	**73**
3.50-3.74	5	3	16	8	19	16	17	16	24	20	25	22	18	17	25	24	32	30	33	32	214	188
3.25-3.49	**28**	**5**	**34**	**12**	**37**	**23**	**38**	**25**	**47**	**37**	**31**	**26**	**43**	**37**	**43**	**39**	**33**	**31**	**39**	**37**	**373**	**272**
3.00-3.24	40	13	56	21	72	37	43	30	59	38	38	28	39	38	36	33	31	28	21	19	435	285
2.75-2.99	**64**	**20**	**79**	**20**	**69**	**24**	**59**	**32**	**57**	**37**	**50**	**37**	**35**	**26**	**28**	**24**	**38**	**33**	**16**	**15**	**495**	**268**
2.50-2.74	62	4	70	15	61	20	52	24	36	25	37	22	26	18	15	9	14	11	6	6	379	154
2.25-2.49	**62**	**6**	**54**	**12**	**52**	**13**	**21**	**10**	**23**	**10**	**26**	**12**	**15**	**8**	**10**	**10**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**3**	**2.7**	**85**
2.00-2.24	29	1	24	1	20	8	10	3	3	1	6	2	4	1	2	2	3	1			101	20
2.00	**13**		**5**		**5**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**		**2**	**1**	**2**	**2**				**.**	**36**	**7**
No GPA	49	2	14	1	9	1	10	1	4	2	7	1	5	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	103	14
Totals	**355**	**56**	**354**	**91**	**349**	**145**	**262**	**149**	**266**	**180**	**225**	**153**	**199**	**159**	**174**	**156**	**167**	**149**	**134**	**128**	**2485**	**1366**

Apps = Number of Applicants
Adm = Number Admitted

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Asian/Pacific Islander Applicants to Law Schools for the Year 1990-91

	LSAT Percentile Ranks																					
	0-10		11-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80		81-90		91-99		Totals	
	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm	Apps	Adm
GPA																						
3.75-	**11**		**5**	**2**	**13**	**5**	**12**	**11**	**6**	**3**	**14**	**13**	**18**	**13**	**28**	**28**	**53**	**47**	**89**	**88**	**249**	**210**
3.50-3.74	2		19	6	31	10	35	19	39	30	46	33	54	39	70	51	105	92	152	144	553	424
3.25-3.49	**21**	**3**	**33**	**6**	**48**	**28**	**57**	**39**	**61**	**45**	**75**	**51**	**83**	**66**	**81**	**66**	**100**	**83**	**135**	**125**	**694**	**512**
3.00-3.24	32	6	71	29	84	29	70	46	72	48	90	70	86	65	64	48	90	78	73	60	732	479
2.75-2.99	**34**	**8**	**74**	**22**	**87**	**29**	**64**	**31**	**91**	**55**	**77**	**56**	**52**	**35**	**56**	**47**	**67**	**51**	**37**	**27**	**639**	**361**
2.50-2.74	41		63	7	84	24	60	25	51	24	38	27	37	24	18	12	41	32	17	14	450	189
2.25-2.49	**45**		**45**	**3**	**52**	**13**	**34**	**13**	**32**	**13**	**31**	**11**	**24**	**15**	**18**	**13**	**13**	**8**	**3**	**2**	**297**	**91**
2.00-2.24	30	2	20	2	21	2	14	2	15	6	11	4	9	6	5	3	5	3	4	2	134	32
2.00	**11**		**4**		**4**		**4**	**1**	**3**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**		**2**	**2**					**33**	**6**
No GPA	129	12	85	23	56	17	27	8	28	10	33	11	18	7	23	14	17	11	8	5	424	118
Totals	**356**	**31**	**419**	**100**	**480**	**157**	**377**	**195**	**398**	**236**	**418**	**277**	**383**	**270**	**365**	**284**	**491**	**405**	**518**	**467**	**4205**	**2422**

Apps = Number of Applicants
Adm = Number Admitted

Appendix B

Selected Information Sources on Financial Aid for Minorities

Contact the following organizations for further information:

Council on Legal Education Opportunity
1800 M Street, NW
Suite 160, South Lobby
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 785-4840

Earl Warren Legal Training Program
99 Hudson Street
Suite 1600
New York, NY 10013
(212) 219-1900

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
634 South Spring Street
11th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90014
(213) 629-2512

Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund
99 Hudson Street
14th Floor
New York, NY 10013
(212) 219-3360

United States Department of Education
(Indian Graduate Professional Fellowships)
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Room 2177
Mail Stop 6335
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 401-1902

Consult the following publications for further information on scholarships for law students:

Grants for Higher Education (published by The Foundation Center, New York, NY)

National Guide to Foundation Funding in Higher Education (published by The Foundation Center, New York, NY)

The White House Fellowships (published by the President's Commission on White House Fellowships)

Free Money for Graduate School: A Directory of Private Grants (published by H.Holt, New York, NY)

The Graduate Scholarship Book: The Complete Guide to Scholarships, Fellowships, Grants, and Loans for Graduate and Professional Study (published by Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ)

Directory of Financial Aids for Minorities (published by ABC-Cleo Information Services, Santa Barbara, CA)

Grants for Minorities (published by The Foundation Center, New York, NY)

Higher Education Opportunities for Minorities and Women, Annotated Selections (Published by United States Department of Education, Washington, DC)

100

Appendix C

Selected Readings for Prelaw Students

Barber, David H. *Winning in Law School: Stress Reduction.* 2d ed. Dillon, CO: Spectra, 1986.

Bell, Susan J. *Interviewing for Success and Satisfaction.* Chicago: American Bar Association/Young Lawyers Division, 1989.

Bell, Susan J. *Full Disclosure: Do You Really Want to Be a Lawyer?* Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides, 1989.

Calamari, John D., and Joseph M. Perillo, eds. *How to Thrive in Law School.* Pelham Manor, NY: Hook Mountain Press, 1984.

Curry, Boykin, ed. *Essays That Worked for Law Schools: 35 Essays from Successful Applications to the Nation's Top Law Schools.* New York: Fawcett Book Group, 1991.

Deaver, Jeff. *The Complete Law School Companion.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1984.

Directory of Law School Joint Degree Programs. 2d ed. Washington, DC: Federal Reports, Inc., 1991.

Financing Your Law School Education. Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Services, Inc., 1991.

Gillers, Stephen, ed. *Looking at Law School: A Student Guide from the Society of American Law Teachers.* 3d ed. NAL/Dutton, 1990.

Goldfarb, Sally F., and Edward A. Adams. *Inside the Law Schools: A Guide by Students for Students.* 5th ed. New York: Plume, 1991.

Hegland, Kenney F. *Introduction to the Study and Practice of Law in a Nutshell.* St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1983.

Mayfield, Craig K. *Reading Skills for Law Students.* Charlottesville, VA: Michie Co., 1980.

Roth, George. *Slaying the Law School Dragon: How to Survive—and Thrive—in First-Year Law School.* 2d ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991.

Utley, Frances, with Gary A. Munneke. *Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers: In the Private Sector.* 2d ed. Chicago: American Bar Association/Law Student Division, 1991.

Appendix D

Differences Between ABA-approved and Non-ABA-approved Law Schools

■ Approved Law Schools

ABA-approved schools. Currently, 176 United States law schools granting the J.D. degree have been approved by the American Bar Association (ABA), that is, they comply with the ABA Standards for Approval of Law Schools. A degree from an ABA-approved school meets the minimum legal educational requirement of all states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. Such a degree entitles a student to take state bar examinations and to practice law in the state or states where he or she is licensed.

Schools with provisional ABA approval. The initial process for a law school seeking approval by the ABA is an application for provisional approval. The ABA standards define that the school "substantially complies with the [ABA] Standards and gives assurances that it will be in full compliance with the Standards within three years after receiving provisional approval." A law school can be granted full approval after having been provisionally approved for at least two years. Graduating from a school with provisional ABA accreditation entitles the student "to the same recognition accorded to students and graduates of fully approved schools." The ABA recognizes the student as a graduate of a fully approved law school even if the school's approval rating had been rescinded during the student's matriculation.

State-approved schools. Graduates of state-approved law schools usually are certified only in the state in which they received their degree. They cannot take the bar examination or practice law anywhere else.

■ Unapproved Schools

If your credentials for admission to law school are not what they should be, alternatives such as unapproved law schools, may begin to look attractive. There are basically three types of unapproved law schools, which are described below. Each of these options has specific risks and limitations.

New Schools

There are some schools that have not been operating long enough to obtain ABA approval—or are not currently satisfying ABA standards. Here are some guidelines to help you assess the risks involved in choosing such a school:

- Have at least some of the administration and faculty been recruited from ABA-approved law schools?
- Examine the school's financial commitment and resources. Are there ample classrooms, library space, and other facilities needed to run a program of high quality?

- Is the law school part of an established university or, better still, part of a state university? This is an important point, because universities supported by state funding tend to be stable institutions. Independent schools are not automatically suspect, but university affiliation signals the availability of adequate resources and support.

- Has the school made a public statement that it has applied or will apply for ABA approval? By putting its reputation on the line, a school is apt to work especially hard to meet ABA standards.

It may take some work but you can compare the unapproved law schools to their ABA-approved counterparts on such factors as library holdings, range of courses offered, faculty-student ratio, and other criteria discussed earlier in this book. Also, you may telephone the office of the ABA's Consultant on Legal Education at 317.264.8340 to learn if the school has applied for ABA approval. [Special thanks are due to the ABA Office of the Consultant for providing this source of information for the reader.]

Schools That Have Not Been—And Will Not Be—Approved

Some states permit graduates of unapproved law schools to take the bar examination or to be admitted reciprocally but most do not. Before you apply or enroll in any school, carefully consider the limitations that these unapproved programs impose, such as limiting practice to the state in which the school is located. About 70 percent of the unapproved law schools in the United States are in the state of California.

Foreign law schools. Think twice before attending a foreign law school if you plan to practice law in the United States. After graduating, you probably will still need at least one full year of legal study in the U.S. to be eligible to take the bar. If you feel you must attend a foreign law school, find out exactly what you will have to do to be admitted to a state bar when you return. Of course, there are a few foreign study opportunities you would almost never pass up: a Rhodes scholarship or law study at Oxford or Cambridge are two examples. For more information on the subject of foreign law schools and U.S. bar exams, consult the ABA's *Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements.*

Other Strategies Not Recommended

Reading the law. Is it possible to learn the law exclusively through "on the job training," that is, by apprenticing yourself to office study? Not really, even though the practice was common in frontier America. Today, only eight states retain the reading-law concept, and they have restrictive regulations. The number of such students admitted to practice is extremely low. Almost as rare are state provisions that sanction law school study that is supplemented by office study.

Law by mail. "You can learn law in your spare time, double your income, and become a respected member of your community," says the ad for correspondence law study. What the ad does not say is that you cannot become a member of the bar

association in most states. The Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the ABA has this to say on the subject of correspondence schools: "The American Bar Association expressly disapproves of correspondence law courses as a means of preparation for bar examination and for practice. Correspondence law school graduates may take the bar examination only in California and even there only under special circumstances." Some prospective law students actually have enrolled in law-by-mail as a preparation for formal law school education. The strategy has no merit.

■ Conclusion

Should you think about attending a law school that has no chance of ever obtaining ABA approval? In a word, no. However, if you are absolutely determined to go to law school one way or another, you must ask yourself if your degree will have any practical value. Will it allow you to take a bar examination and give you the chance to be admitted to the practice of law? If so, will you be adequately prepared for a legal career, or will you be forced into nonlegal jobs for which your training was not even necessary? It is **imperative** that you learn the school's bar examination passage rate and the percentage of graduates who find jobs. You may be one of the few who attend an unapproved law school, pass the bar, and benefit from a rewarding career, but you will be defying the odds all the way.